

Some Exemplary Characters of the Mahābhārata



Jayadayal Goyandka

Some Exemplary Characters of the Mahābhārata

(Rendered into English by M.L. Pandey)

tvameva mātā ca pitā tvameva
tvameva bandhuśca sakhā tvameva
tvameva vidyā draviṇaṁ tvameva
tvameva sarvaṁ mama devadeva

त्वमेव	माता	च	पिता	त्वमेव
त्वमेव	बन्धुश्च		सखा	त्वमेव ।
त्वमेव	विद्या		द्रविणं	त्वमेव
त्वमेव	सर्वं		मम	देवदेव ॥

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Publisher's Note

We are happy to present this booklet in the hands of our readers. It contains ten articles in all. The first article Sri Krishna is a composition of Nitya Lilalina Sri Hanuman Prasad Poddar and the rest of nine articles are composed by Brahmalina Sri Jaydayal Goyandka. In these articles some highly educative incidents and the character sketches of important personages of Mahabharata are presented.

We hope that readers will receive the book cordially as usual and get spiritually benefited.

Publisher

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Śrī Kṛṣṇa—The Embodiment of Knowledge

In the modern times many unfounded presumptions are made regarding Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Some people hold that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was not a historical personage. Some say that there had been a man named Śrī Kṛṣṇa a few thousand years ago but he was only an extraordinary human being. But the aspect of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as we find in *Bhagavadgītā* is the aspect of true knowledge. Such personage had never been in this world. Some opine that several personages known as Kṛṣṇa have been there. Kṛṣṇa of *Bhāgavata* was different from that of *Mahābhārata*. Not only this, some say even to the extent that Kṛṣṇa of Vṛndāvana was someone else, the other Kṛṣṇa was of Mathurā and the third Kṛṣṇa was of Dwārakā. In this article an attempt will be made on the authority of *Mahābhārata* to show that Śrī Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* and that of *Bhāgavata* were the same—the integral whole and the Supreme Being. The aspect that has been described in the *Gītā* is His real aspect and the allusions made at different places in the *Mahābhārata* go to prove this fact.

(1)

Like *Bhāgavata*, the *Mahābhārata* also upholds the

fact that the controller of the world, the god of gods and the master of the entire universe Lord Nārāyaṇa had descended upon the earth as Śrī Kṛṣṇa (*Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva*, chapter 64). In the *Rājasūya Yajña* performed by *Dharmarāja* Yudhiṣṭhira, the celestial sage Nārada along with other great *Maharṣis* arrived there to see the grand Yajña. Finding Śrī Kṛṣṇa present in the canopied hall along with other kings, he is reminded of the fact that Lord Nārāyaṇa had manifested himself upon the earth (*Sabhā Parva* 36.12) and mentally dwells upon lotus eyed Śrī Hari. Later on when the question cropped up in the assembly as to who amongst the honourable guests should be adored first, the high souled Bhīṣma, the eldest among the members of the Kuru race and bravest of the brave, declared that he considered Śrī Kṛṣṇa the Supreme to be adored first and began to speak highly of His glory in the crowded assembly. He begins thus—Vāsudeva himself is the cause of creation and dissolution of the world of created beings consisting of animate and inanimate objects. Vāsudeva alone is the unmanifest nature, the invariable creator and the Lord of the entire created beings and hence He is supremely worthy of adoration.” The celestial sage Nārada also supports the proposal (*Sabhā Parva* 39.8). Further, the gods shower flowers from the sky on Sahadeva who seconded the proposal and the voice without form echoed the words ‘Well said!’

‘Well said!’ in praise of him.

We do not find a direct description of childhood activities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata*. The reason is that such activities have no bearing to the main episode of the *Mahābhārata*. Of course in the *Harivaṁśa Parva* which is an epilogue to the *Mahābhārata* this deficiency has been made good. Nevertheless we find here and there in the *Mahābhārata* itself reference to such activities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa made by its various characters. Opposing the aforesaid proposal of grandfather Bhīṣma, Śiśupāla, the king of Chedi, who was an antagonist of Śrī Kṛṣṇa since his birth and who had become all the more envious of him since after the abduction of Rukmiṇī, mentions the events of His childhood—the event of the killing of Pūtānā, Bakāsura, Kesī, Vṛṣāsura and Kaṁsa, the overturning of the cart and the lifting up of the Gobardhana mountain etc. (*Sabhā Parva* 4. 7—11). Although he refers to these events with a view to censure Him, he admittedly accepts their veracity. The description of the superhuman activities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa given by an enemy not only reveals the super natural character of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but also provides ample reason to reconsider their opinion to those who regard the Śrī Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* as different from that of the *Bhāgavata*. Well, in that context Śiśupāla spoke very ill of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as well as Bhīṣma Pitāmaha who praised Him. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa put up with all his transgressions bravely. But when

He found that he would not be pacified despite the persuasions by the courtiers He invoked His discus called Sudarśana (*Sabhā Parva* 45. 21) and with that sharp edged discus beheaded him in the presence of all. All the people present in the assembly at that time noticed that a large orb of effulgent light came out of Śiśupāla's body and having made obeisance to universally adored Śrī Kṛṣṇa entered into His Being. This unnatural incident not only bears the proof of the divinity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa but also gives evident proof of the fact that however great a sinner might be, attains salvation (the merger of the individual soul with the Oversoul) in case he is killed by the divine hands and is forever merged with the aspect of the divine being. This is verily His matchless grace. Even through killing He redeems the embodied beings. So there is nothing uncommon if he plays into the hands of those who love Him like *Pāṇḍavas*.

(2)

When Draupadī is insulted by Duḥśāsana she feeling altogether helpless raises a cry for Śrī Kṛṣṇa and addresses him by such names as—'Beloved of the Gopīs', 'The saviour of Vraja and other like names. This further goes to prove that the Śrī Kṛṣṇa of Vṛndāvana and that of Mathurā were not different personages. So, hearing the pathetic call of Draupadī the compassionate Keśava comes running from Dwārakā and hiding Himself as *Dharma* behind her clothes saves

the modesty of Draupadī (*Sabhā Parva* 67. 45–49). Can a human being rescue his dear one sitting in a far off place in such a miraculous way?

(3)

Having lost their all in the game of dice the righteous *Pāṇḍavas* were undergoing the hardships of banishment. Śrī Kṛṣṇa also arrived at the place. Meanwhile the great ascetic Mārkaṇḍeya blessed with a long lease of life, came up there of his own accord and during the course of conversation related to them the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Telling them his experiences of the period of dissolution he says—“the wonderful child whom I saw lying on a banyan leaf in the unfathomable depth of water was none else than Kṛṣṇa, relative of yours. By virtue of the boon granted by Him my memory remains ever unfailing and I have been blessed with a long life span extending for thousands of years and also death at my will.”

Once sent by Duryodhana with the intention of causing harm to the *Pāṇḍavas* the irascible great sage Durvāsā accompanied by ten thousand disciples guested with the *Pāṇḍavas*. Now by the grace of Sun-god Yudhiṣṭhira had obtained such a miraculous pot that the little foodgrain cooked in it could be sufficient to feed any number of guests to their heart's content. But this could be done only so long as Draupadī would not take her meals. Through Duryodhana's conspiracy

Durvāsā arrived at a time when Draupadī had taken her meal after feeding all others. The pious Yudhiṣṭhira who was by nature hospitable to the guests invited the congregation of the sages to dine and they went to the bank of the river Gaṅgā to bathe and to perform their daily rituals. Unable to find any means to feed thousands of *Brāhmaṇas*, Draupadī was greatly worried at that critical moment. In her heart she remembered Śrī Kṛṣṇa, her well-wisher and kinsman and He came running to her without any loss of time. As soon as He came He said that He was terribly hungry and demanded something to eat without delay. Draupadī related to Him the whole story. She said she had just finished her meal and there is nothing left in that pot. Turning a deaf ear to what she said He spoke thus “Where is the pot? Please bring it to me. Let me have a look at it.” Draupadī brought the pot to him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa noticed that a vegetable leaf was sticking at the neck of the pot. Putting it into His mouth He said—“Let the Lord, the universal soul and enjoyer of sacrifices be satisfied with this vegetable leaf.” Then He asked Sahadevajī to go and get the host of sages for dinner. Reaching the bank of river Gaṅgā, Sahadevajī found none of them there. Now it so happened that when the Lord, having put the vegetable leaf into His mouth was pronouncing His resolve, the sages standing in the water were reciting ‘अघमर्षण’ ‘*Mantra* of the mid day

Sandhyā. All of them felt that their bellies had become suddenly loaded with food upto the very throat. Then they were very much frightened to visualize that the food cooked at the house of the *Pāṇḍavas* would be a waste and they stealthily fled away from there presupposing that the *Pāṇḍavas* would be angry on that account. He knew what had happened to him at the house of Ambarīṣa and ever since that incident, had become afraid of the Lord's devotees. Not finding them there Sahadeva returned. Thus Śrī Hari, well disposed to those taking shelter in Him, saved those who took refuge in Him. Hail to such a love for the devotees. Such episode of Śrī Kṛṣṇa reveals that he was vested with godhood and was all pervasive.

(4)

Sañjaya was the minister of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his favourite too. As an envoy of the *Kauravas* he goes to the *Pāṇḍavas* at Upaplavya and after returning from there delivers their message to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. In that context describing the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa he observes—
“If Śrī Kṛṣṇa so desires He can reduce the entire world to ashes simply by His resolve but the entire world together cannot reduce Śrī Kṛṣṇa to ashes.”

Where there is truth there is righteousness; where there is modesty and hesitancy and straightforwardness there is Śrī Kṛṣṇa and where there is Śrī Kṛṣṇa, there is victory. Through His divine potency He runs the

wheel of time, the wheel of the world and the wheel of millennium. He is verily the Lord of Time, Death and the universe consisting of animate and inanimate objects. The great Ṛṣi Vedavyāsa, the author of the *Mahābhārata* was also present there at that time. Approving of the assertion of Sañjaya, he says—“O king, whatever Śaṅjaya has said is quite true. He truly knows the aspect of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the controller of Māyā, the ancient Being and indweller of all. If you will listen to what he says with undivided mind he will rid you of the fear of the world.

When Śrī Kṛṣṇa arrives in the assembly of the *Kauravas* with the truce proposal of the *Pāṇḍavas*, many celestial sages and great Ṛṣis present themselves there in order to listen to the divine and prudent speech of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and listen to His divine speech as if they were spellbound. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa finishes his holy speech the great Ṛṣis one by one support the proposal and try to bring Duryodhana round and simultaneously describe the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. They tell him that Lord Nārāyaṇa, the creator of the entire universe, the master of all and the passive observer of the good and evil actions of all, has manifested himself as Śrī Kṛṣṇa but since doom was looming large on Duryodhan's head, he did not pay heed to the salutary speech of those great souls, rather being irritated with Śrī Kṛṣṇa began to think of some device to imprison him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa

came to know of his craftiness, Scolding him in the presence of all He said—“O wretch, thou thinkest I am all alone unassisted by anyone and that is why thou desirest to overpower me and capture me. But little dost thou know that all the Andhakas, the Vṛṣṇis and the *Pāṇḍavas* are present here and Ādityas, Rudras, Vasus and all the great Ṛṣis too are present here. Saying so Kṛṣṇa laughed heartily. At that very moment Brahmā and other gods effulgent like the lightning became visible in His limbs. Their bodies were of the size of a thumb and they were letting off sparks of fire. On the forehead of Śrī Kṛṣṇa was seated Brahmā, on his chest, Rudra and on his arms were seated Indra and other guardians of different universes. Not only these but also Agni, Ādityas, Sādhyas, Vasus, Aśvinīkumāras, Marudgaṇa, Yakṣas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas and others were present there. From the right arm of Śrī Kṛṣṇa emanated Arjuna holding the *Gāṇḍīva* and from the left emanated Balarāma holding the plough as his weapon. Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīmasena, Nakula, Sahadeva, Pradyumna and the Yādavas belonging to Andhaka and Vṛṣṇi race emanated from the back and stood before Śrī Kṛṣṇa nicely equipped with their respective arms. In His arms were bedecked the conch, the disc, the mace and the lotus, the bow called *Śārṅga* and sword. From His eyes, nostrils and ears came out terrible flames and from the pores of His body streamed

forth rays like that of the sun.

Seeing this ferocious form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa all the kings who were present there began to tremble out of fear and they shut their eyes. Only Droṇa the preceptor, grandfather Bhīṣma, Vidura, the great soul Sañjaya and the great ascetics, Ṛṣis, rich in austerities remained seated there unmoved. The Lord had bestowed on them the divine eye. At that instant the gods began to blow trumpets and shower flowers from the sky. At the request of Dhṛtarāṣṭra the Lord granted the divine eye to him also. He was wonder-struck to look at that divine form. After a little while the Lord withdrew that divine form and at once left the assembly hall (*Udyoga Parva* 131.1–24). Do we require any better proof of his Godhood?

(5)

In *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* occurring in the *Bhīṣma Parva* we find elaborate descriptions of the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. There he explains to Arjuna very clearly with his own mouth that He is birthless and deathless Lord of all beings. At times He takes birth for the protection of the virtuous and the extirpation of the evil-doers (*Gītā* 4. 6–8). He further explains that he who knows His divine birth and activities, is freed from transmigration (*Gītā* 4.9) This shows that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was not an ordinary man like us who are subject to repeated births and deaths. How can one be freed from the rotation of birth and death through knowing the birth

of one who himself is subject to birth and death over and over again? He goes on to explain that He is the source of the entire creation and in Him again it dissolves and there is nothing else besides Him (*Gītā* 7. 6-7). He very clearly explains to Arjuna that veiled by His divine potency He keeps His divinity hidden from others and that is why the ignorant fail to recognize Him and take the unborn and imperishable supreme spirit to be subject to birth and death. Even when Śrī Kṛṣṇa in His divine form was present on the earth many men like Kāṁsa, Jarāsandha, Śiśupāla, Duryodhana and such others existed here who looking Him for an ordinary person often slighted Him. So there is nothing surprising if in His absence the people of the present age hold high or low opinions about Him and put forward unsound reasonings in reference to Him.

To enable Arjuna perceive His limitless glory, Śrī Kṛṣṇa out of compassion reveals to him His cosmic form. Arjuna saw the effulgence of a thousand suns bursting forth from His body (*Gītā* 11.12). Arjuna beheld within His body gods, *Ṛṣis* and host of different beings (*Gītā* 11.15). He is endowed with numerous arms, bellies, mouths and eyes and having innumerable forms on all sides. Neither His beginning nor middle nor even His end could be seen (*Gītā* 11.16). Arjuna also beheld, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karna etc., the principal warriors on the *Kaurava* side are crushed under His terrible jaws

(*Gītā* II.4) and all the realms being swallowed through His mouth (*Gītā* 11.30). Seeing this terrible form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Arjuna driven with fear starts singing hymns to God and craves forgiveness for the treatment of his own parity accorded to Him thinking Him only to be a friend. (*Gītā* 11.41-42, 44) Noticing Arjuna frightened the Lord withdraws His form of Time spirit (all devouring) and again manifests Himself to Arjuna in the form of Śyāmasundara (*Gītā* 11.51). Thus the Lord made Arjuna witness that He who is present before him all the time in the form of Śyāmasundara capable of attracting the three worlds, is verily the universe itself and keeping Himself unattached from it, causes its creation and destruction and through devotion to Him, He can be known in essence, can be seen and even realized (*Gītā* 11.54). So in the end the Lord exhorts Arjuna thus—You should meditate on Me alone, love Me, adore Me and practise My remembrance and relinquishing all other shelters, take refuge in Me (*Gītā* 18. 65-66).

This is the last gospel of the *Gītā*. The real aspect of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the same as has found expression in the *Gītā*. He is beyond the world (the perishable matter) superior even to the imperishable soul and the integral whole and the Supreme Person (*Gītā* 15.18). Such an aspect of Him stands to reason only by taking refuge in Him alone. So to know Śrī Kṛṣṇa we have to take refuge in Him (being devoid of pride of wisdom). By

taking refuge in Him like Arjuna, He himself will let you know His true aspect. Then uniting our voice with that of Arjuna we shall exclaim—O Lord, through your grace, I have been rid of ignorance. Your true aspect is now clear to me and I will carry out your bidding without any scruple (*Gītā* 18.73). Hereafter all my undertakings will be guided by the Lord. Though engaged in all sorts of activities actually we will be doing nothing. This is freedom from the bondage of actions as propounded in the *Gītā*. For such people alone has the Lord said that even having slaughtered all these creatures he does not really slay (*Gītā* 18.17). They simply become an instrument in the hands of the Lord.

(6)

Grandfather Bhīṣma, the grand old man of the *Kaurava* race was such an instrument in the hands of the Lord. Being pierced through his vital organs with arrows showered by Arjuna he lay on the bed of arrows and was awaiting for the sun to move towards the northern hemisphere, in order to give up his mortal frame of his will. When the war came to an end and Yudhiṣṭhira had been coronated, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa along with the *Pāṇḍavas* went to battlefield of Kurukṣetra with a view to make them listen to the holy exhortations from the mouth of Bhīṣma. Noticing Śrī Kṛṣṇa's arrival Bhīṣma was filled with great delight and with inordinate love began to sing His praises. Śrī Kṛṣṇa also spoke

very highly of him and said—“After your giving up the mortal frame and departing to the other world, the entire knowledge shall be lost to the world.” He prayed him to exhort the knowledge to the *Pāṇḍavas*.

Bhīṣma said—“My Lord, my mind is tormented with the pain caused by the arrows. Every limb is aching and my intellectual powers have ebbed away. I feel acute burning sensation in the vital parts and my speech is faltering. In such a state how shall I be able to impart instructions. I have lost even the sense of directions. I am sustaining my life-breath only on the score of strength lent by you. So my master, excuse me and be good to instruct the *Pāṇḍavas* yourself. For you alone are the source of all the scriptures. Little to speak of others even Br̥haspati (the preceptor of gods) shall feel hesitation in speaking before you. Just as a disciple cannot arrogate himself to take upon him the task of instructing others in the presence of his preceptor, so also man like myself cannot instruct others in your presence (*Śānti Parva* 3.13). At this Śrī Kṛṣṇa blessed that thenceforth he would neither remorse, nor feel senselessness nor burning sensation nor pain, nor shall he be tormented by hunger and thirst. Through My grace, enlightenment shall dawn upon you unsolicited and your intellect shall ever be established in *Sattva* Mode.” Vyāsa and many other great Ṛṣis were present there on that occasion. All of them adored Śrī Kṛṣṇa by reciting the *Vedic Mantras*

and hymns and flowers were rained from the sky.

Next day Bhīṣma started giving sermons. Through the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa his burning sensation, stupor, tiresomeness, remorse and pain were simultaneously eradicated. He regained the power of mind and speech. Then wonderfully enough he exhorted continuously for a number of days on such important subjects as the duties enjoined on men of different castes and stages in life, the duties of a king, the duties of critical times, the duties of attaining salvation, the duties pertaining to religious rites performed for the deceased, the duties pertaining to the offering of charities and such other topics. At last when the sun actually moved to the northern hemisphere, the high souled Bhīṣma establishing himself in *Yoga* gave up his mortal frame in the presence of Lord Kṛṣṇa. At that moment the gods blew trumpets and flowers were strewn from above. The *Pāṇḍavas* performed his obsequies in the prescribed way.

(7)

Thus having installed *Dharmarāja* as the king of Hastināpura, Śrī Kṛṣṇa returned to Dwārakā. On the way He happened to meet the highly glorious *Ṛṣi* named Uttāṅka. Hearing from the mouth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa about the exterminating of the *Kauravas* he flew into great rage. He said—“O Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the *Kauravas* were your relatives and favourite too. Even though wielding power you failed to protect them. You did not dissuade

them from fighting by exercising your power. So I must curse you.” Śrī Kṛṣṇa said—Nobody can slight me by virtue of his austerities, so you must control your anger. I know that you are an ascetic and devoted to your preceptor so I do not desire to set your austerities at naught. Thereafter Śrī Kṛṣṇa took pity on him and said—“I alone am the creator and destroyer of the entire created beings. Whenever change of *Yuga* takes place, I manifest Myself in different species for the good of the common people and for the establishment of *Dharma* on a firm footing. When I body Myself forth in a certain species I behave in accordance with the norms of that species. This time I am born as a man, so I behave like a human being. As a man I craved the *Kauravas* for peace and threatened them with dire consequences but on account of infatuation they turned a deaf ear to Me and that was why all of them were killed. But through fighting they all have attained heavenly state after death (*Āśwamedhika Parva* 54.15—21). Then at the request of *Rṣi* Uttāṅka He revealed His Cosmic Form to him and then returned to Dwārakā.

(8)

Likewise of Uttāṅka’s wrath Śrī Kṛṣṇa had also to become the victim of Gāndhārī’s wrath. At the end of the war in order to perform the funeral of his kinsmen and to offer them water (sacred to the deceased) king Dhṛtarāṣṭra had gone to the battlefield

of Kurukṣetra accompanied by the *Pāṇḍavas*, Gāndhārī, Kuntī, Draupadī and other female members of the *Kuru* race. There they saw the corpses of sons, brothers, fathers and husbands lying on the ground and birds of prey and carnivorous animals snatching flesh from their bodies and eating them. Seeing that heart-rending sight the ladies of the *Kuru* race loudly lamenting over their death fell on the ground and raised a piteous cry. The chaste Gāndhārī devoted to her husband, could not control her grief and fell down senseless. After a short while when she regained her senses she cast an angry look at Śrī Kṛṣṇa and spoke thus—‘Śrī Kṛṣṇa, you could if you sincerely desired, prevent this terrible slaughter of mankind. But in spite of your capabilities you would not do so. So on the score of the merit I have earned through the service of my husband I invoke this curse on you that just as you have ignored the doom of the *Kauravas* so also you shall be the cause of inviting the doom of your own kinsmen. In the thirty sixth year from now the ministers of your own race and your sons shall meet their doom and while roaming in the forest unattended by anyone you shall be killed in an ordinary manner and people will not be able even to know about it.

If Kṛṣṇa had so desired He could have rendered the curse ineffective. But the extirpation of the *Yādavas* was what He himself desired. Through the *Mahābhārata*

war His object of lightening the burden upon the earth was mainly achieved. Now through causing the extirpation of the *Yādavas*, the partially unfinished task would be over. But so long as He lived upon the earth none could venture to inflict any harm to the *Yādavas*. So making Gāndhārī's curse the chief cause, He thought it worthwhile to bring about the destruction of His own kinsmen through mutual conflicts. That was why paying due regard to the supernal powers Gāndhārī acquired by her through dedication to her husband, He gladly took the curse upon Him (*Strī Parva* 25.48–50) and when due time came He got the entire *Yādava* race killed in mutual conflicts.

(9)

The object of His incarnation having thus been achieved the Lord decided to depart to His supreme abode and for the truthful execution of Gāndhārī's curse He having controlled His senses, speech and mind was lost in the state of *Samādhi* (unperturbed sustained meditation). Meanwhile through His own motivation a cruel hunter named Jarā came up there. Mistaking Him for a deer, he shot an arrow at the sole of one of his feet while He was lying motionless in the state of *Samādhi*. When he approached nearer and realized his mistake, out of fright he held both the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa into his hands. Having consoled him Kṛṣṇa left for His celestial abode filling the earth and

sky with an amazing brilliance. On that occasion Indra, Aświnīkumāras, *Rudras*, *Ādityas*, *Vasus*, *Viśvedevas*, the sages, the accomplished souls, the fairies and the chief *Gandharvas*—all came to escort Him (*Mausala Parva* 4. 23—26). Thus delighting to His own devotees with His all purifying activities directed towards universal good and granting redemption to the wicked on the pretext of extirpating them ended His plays as divine incarnate.

Thither, when the *Pāṇḍavas* learnt about the extirpation of the Yādava race and the departure of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to His supreme abode, they were much grieved. They too having installed their grand-son Parīkṣit, the son of Abhimanyu, on the throne and having deputed Yuyutsu, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra as his caretaker, proceeded towards the Himālayas. Having crossed the Himālayas, they proceeded towards the mountain called Meru. Meanwhile Draupadī, Sahadeva, Nakula, Arjuna and Bhīma having completed the span of their life one by one dropped down dead. Only *Dharmarāja* Yudhiṣṭhira accompanied by a dog proceeded onwards and arrived at the celestial abode in his mortal frame. There he took bath in the Gaṅgā, the river of gods, and having given up the mortal human form assumed a divine aspect. In that divine form he arrived at the supreme abode of the Lord. There he beheld Śrī Kṛṣṇa as consciousness solidified. His weapons such as the Disc and others

having assumed divine human form were attending on Him. The valiant and splendrous Arjuna was also in attendance on Him.

Such is the real aspect of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and such is sweet fruit of developing guileless love of the revered feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa through surrender to Him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is eternal. Even now He offers love to His devotees by granting them His vision and by indulging in playful pranks with them. If we so desire we can be freed from fears forever by taking refuge in His revered feet capable of granting freedom from all fears. Hail to Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇacandrajī.



Bhīṣma—The Great Soul

Bhīṣma, the great soul, was the son of King Śāntanu, a descendant of the well-known lineage of the *Kurus*. It was goddess Gaṅgā who begot him. From amongst the gods known as the *Vasus* it was the ninth Vasu called Dyau who descended upon the earth in the form of Bhīṣma in consequence of the curse invoked by the great Ṛṣi Vasiṣṭha. Even as a boy he studied the *Vedas* along with their corollaries and also learnt through repeated practices the use of divine weapons. While practising the use of weapons once he intercepted the flow of the Ganges with his arrows. In his childhood he was called as Devavrata.

One day sage King Śāntanu was strolling in the forest. Suddenly his eyes caught sight of a beautiful woman named Satyawatī, the daughter of the king of *Kaivartas* and was fascinated towards her. Though Satyawatī was verily a princess she was brought up in the house of *Kaivartarāja*. The condition which her father, the king of *Kaivartas* put before the king for wooing her, was that the son born of her would be entitled to the kingdom. The king would not accept such a condition but he could not quite dismiss the girl from his mind. He remained melancholy obsessed

with the anxiety to get her. When Devavrata came to know the cause of king's sadness, he himself approached her father the king of *Kaivartas* and begged for the girl's hand for his father's sake. Expressing his agreement to the condition stipulated by him, he took a pledge in the presence of all that the son born to her would be sole heir apparent. But *Kaivartarāja* would not be satisfied with this much. He thought to himself that Bhīṣma's words would not turn false but the son born to him could be a claimant for the throne. Wise Devavrata did not fail to understand his intention. He at once took another terrible pledge that he would observe celibacy through the whole of his life. Hearing this terrible pledge of adolescent Bhīṣma, the gods showered flowers and since then people began to call him by the name Bhīṣma (the terrible). Bhīṣma escorted Satyavatī to his father and entrusted her to him. On hearing the arduous task done by Bhīṣma King Śāntanu was much pleased and he granted his son the boon of death only at his will.

Thus in the early years of his life Bhīṣma set the example of supreme sacrifice before the world by fulfilling the desire of his father. For the sake of fulfilling a trivial desire of his father he unhesitatingly sacrificed the state for whose sake a sanguinary battle was fought in his own presence only after the gap of a generation or two by his own sons and grand sons. Women and wealth for whose sake there has been so

much of bloodshed in the history of the world and a number of states lost their existence, were relinquished by him forever like a grass blade and thus he acted like a great dispassionate soul. Hail to such a devotion to one's father!

King Śāntanu had two sons born of Satyavatī's womb. The name of the elder one was Citrāṅgada and that of the younger one was Vicitravīrya. Citrāṅgada had hardly entered the threshold of youth when King Śāntanu passed away from this world. Citrāṅgada ascended the throne but soon he was killed in the battle fought with the *Gandharvas*. Vicitravīrya was yet a boy, so he began to look after the affairs of the state under the guardianship of Bhīṣma. As years rolled by Bhīṣma became concerned about the marriage of Vicitravīrya. During those days the *Svayaṁvara* of the three daughters of the king of Kashi was going to be held. Riding a chariot Bhīṣma reached Kashi all by himself. In order to be wedded to his brother, he forcibly abducted the three daughters of the king of Kashi, seated them into his chariot and started towards Hastināpura. Subsequently all the kings who had gathered there for taking part in the *Svayaṁvara* rushed at him but their efforts were of no avail. Single handed (though he was), he defeated all of them, and escorting them home handed them over to Vicitravīrya. This was the first occasion when the world came to know of his matchless might and skill in the use of weapons.

Of the three daughters of Kaśirāja who were

forcibly taken away by Bhīṣma, the eldest called Ambā had chosen king Śālva as her husband from the core of her heart. When Bhīṣma came to know this he sent her to Śālva and married the remaining two to Vicitravīrya. But Vicitravīrya did not live long. So after his marriage he became a prey to tuberculosis and left this mortal world. He had no issue and so the question of the lineage of the *Kurus* was at stake. Bhīṣma could easily take up the reigns of the state into his hands, if he had so desired. The subjects were verily in his favour. He had now no impediment of any sort in marrying himself but even the greatest persuasion or exigence could not shake him from his solemn pledge. Repeating the solemn pledge made to Satyawatī's father he had once asserted—"I can renounce not only the domain of the three spheres, and the heavenly state of Brahmā alone but also salvation; but cannot renounce pledge of truth at any cost. Let the five elements give up their inherent properties, let the moon give up his attribute, nay even *Dharmarāja* might deviate from the path of righteousness yet I cannot even dream of forsaking my solemn pledge. Such should be the fulfilment of one's solemn pledge.

Now it so happened that Śālva refused to accept Ambā. She rolled like pendulum in between. Shamefacedly she could not return even to her father's place. Holding Bhīṣma responsible for her plight she started cursing him from the core of her heart and began

to devise plans to avenge him. On the advice of her grandfather (mother's father) she took refuge in Paraśurāma, the son of Jamadagni, and related to him the cause of her grief. It was through Paraśurāma that Bhīṣma had learnt the use of divine weapons. He called Bhīṣma to Kurukṣetra and said to him —“By overpowering her and touching her you have polluted the girl, so Śālva has refused to accept her. So now you will have to marry her ceremoniously. Bhīṣma did not accept his suggestion. He said—this girl told me that she had already given her heart to Śālva. How could then I keep her with me? How can a religious minded person marry one who has given her heart away to someone other than himself? Now Paraśurāma burnt with rage as it were. He said—“Bhīṣma, little do you know that not less than twenty one times, I have rendered the earth rid of the *Kṣatriyas*.” “Bhīṣma was not yet born” responded Bhīṣma. Hearing such a rude reply he challenged Bhīṣma to a duel. Bhīṣma accepted the challenge and consequently a fierce battle was fought between the preceptor and the disciple. The battle continued for twenty three days but none of them was ready to accept defeat. At last the gods and the sages intervened and brought the rivalry to an end. Thus even by defying the proposal of Paraśurāma, he adhered to the truth and through his matchless prowess he put to rout Paraśurāma, the matchless archer. It was an example of culmination of bravery and being scrupulously true to one's promise.

In the battle of the *Mahābhārata* it was Bhīṣma alone who was the best warrior on the *Kauravas*' side. That was why the great honour of being the first commander was bestowed on none but him. Being the grandfather of both the *Kauravas* and the *Pāṇḍavas* he had equal affection and sympathy for both of them and he cherished the desire for the welfare of both of them although he knew that *Dharma* and justice were on the *Pāṇḍavas*' side. He had greater sympathy for the *Pāṇḍavas* and cherished the desire for the *Pāṇḍavas*' victory in his heart. Still in spite of his bias for the *Pāṇḍavas* he never granted them any concession on the battlefield and tried to defeat them even at the cost of his life. Out of eighteen days the battle lasted, Bhīṣma worked as the commander of *Kaurava* army for no less than ten days and during that period he slaughtered a large part of the *Pāṇḍava* armies. Being old he displayed such uncommon valour that in spite of His pledge of not taking up arms Śrī Kṛṣṇa had to take up arms twice and face him in order to defend Arjuna. Once finding Arjuna helpless He rushed towards him with disc in His hand and on another occasion He dared Bhīṣma with the whip in His hand and thus while saving the life of a devotee and enhancing the glory of the other through His double sided love of His devotees. At last when the *Pāṇḍavas* came to realize that so long as Bhīṣma was alive it is impossible to get victory over the *Kauravas*, they desired to know from their own grandfather how he

could possibly be killed and taking pity on them he revealed the method. He told them that Śikhaṇḍī the son of Drupada was born a female still though his sex has been transformed, he treated him as a woman and so he could not take up arms against him. He added that in case he would come up before him for a fight, he wouldn't take up arms against him and at such a moment Arjuna could kill him. Can there be any better example of valour as well as the observance of duties assigned to the *Kṣatriyas* than this?

Having received fatal wounds when Bhīṣma fell on the ground, every pore of his body was pierced with arrows. He lay down supported by the arrows. His body did not touch the earth. At that time the sun had been in the southern hemisphere. Death during such a period is considered ominous, so he remained lying with his body supported on the arrows waiting for a change of the movement of the sun towards the other hemisphere for death was at his will by virtue of the boon granted to him by his father. On that eventful day battle came to an end with the fall of Bhīṣma. The *Kauravas* as well as the *Pāṇḍavas* stood in attention around Bhīṣma. The whole of Bhīṣma's body was lying balanced on the arrows. Only his head was swinging downwards. He demanded some sort of support for it. People brought supremely excellent pillows and put them before him but he spurned them. Then he addressed these words to Arjuna—"My son,

you do know the *Dharma* of the *Kṣatriyas*. You arrange for a pillow that may grace me.” Arjuna at once guessed what the bravest of the brave meant. Only a brave person can understand the secret meaning of the hint given by another brave man. He struck arrows which raised his head and supported it. For the treatment of Bhīṣmajī Duryodhana called for royal physicians who were expert in pulling out arrows. Grandfather Bhīṣma sent all of them back with due respect. Being blessed with the state befitting a brave person he considered it insulting to undergo treatment. Everyone was wonder-struck to notice his supreme devotion to *Dharma* and extraordinary courage. Even in that state he tried his best for a cease fire and establishing peace between the two sides but he could not be successful in his efforts. Such was the outcome of divine will and none could avert it.

The throat of Bhīṣmajī was continuously becoming dry. Due to intolerable pain caused by arrows, He felt burning sensation through the whole of his body. He asked for water. People presented to him stiff necked jars full of cool and fragrant water. Bhīṣmajī refused to accept it. He said—“I would no more enjoy the delicacies enjoyed by the worldly people and hitherto enjoyed by me, for now I am lying on the bed of arrows.” Then he called Arjuna to his presence and said—“My son, you alone can provide me water.” Saying “as you please” Arjuna took out a brilliantly shining arrow from his quiver and associating it with

the divine weapon called '*Parjanya*' struck it against the ground adjacent to Bhīṣma. At once witnessed by all the people, spurted from the earth a celestial stream of water directly fell into the mouth of Bhīṣmajī. Bhīṣmajī's thirst was fully quenched with that nectarine water and he highly praised this act of Arjuna. Since then he denied to himself food and water and so long as he lived he not only underwent the unendurable pain caused by the arrows but also continued to suffer the pangs of thirst and hunger. Thus he displayed forbearance and power of endurance at its climax.

Noble minded Bhīṣma was not only ideally devoted to his parents, scrupulously true to his pledge and exemplary warrior but also possessed profound knowledge of the scriptures, knowledge in essence of *Dharma* and God and was a notable devotee. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa himself was full of praise for his profound knowledge. He went to the extent of acclaiming that after his passing away all knowledge shall be enveloped in obscurity and none but he was competent enough to alleviate the doubts that would arise in matters of doubtful nature. Through the inspiration and powers conferred on him by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa he exhorted Yudhiṣṭhira continuously for many days on such important subjects as the duties enjoined on men of different castes and stages in life, as the duties of a king, the duties meant for crisis period, the duties for attaining salvation, the duties pertaining to offerings made to the manes, the duties

with regard to offering of charities, the duties meant for the womenfolk etc. These exhortations are compiled in the cantos entitled *Śāntiparva* and *Anuśāsanaparva* of the *Mahābhārata*. It was the work of none else but Bhīṣma to alleviate the doubts of Yudhiṣṭhira who was born of an aspect of *Dharma* and the very embodiment of *Dharma*, relating to duties enjoined on everyone. The great sages like Vyāsa and others had gathered to listen to his exhortations.

Those days very few people possessed such a fair knowledge of the glory and excellence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as was possessed by Bhīṣmajī. Many times he had described the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Duryodhana. On the occasion of the *Rājasūya Yajña* while trying to prove the worthiness of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to be adored first, he had described His glory in the crowded assembly hall and established that He was God incarnate. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa holding the discus in His hand ran on behalf of Arjuna, he thought it praiseworthy to be killed by His hands and so he invoked Him in order to adore Him by means of weapons. The *Viṣṇusahasranāma* containing a thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu narrated by Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhira reflects his devotion and knowledge of divinity. Even now that *Stotra* is held in high esteem by the devotees. Like the *Gītā*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtras*, Lord Śaṅkarācārya has also written a detailed commentary on it. It was the result of his devotion that Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa blessed him by presenting Himself in

person at the time of his death. With whatever angle of vision we examine the character of Bhīṣma—devotion, knowledge or righteous conduct, we find him an ideal person. Great men talented like Bhīṣma are rarely to be found in the history of the world. Though Bhīṣma himself died heirless, the Hindus belonging to the three *Varnas* (*Brāhmaṇas*, *Kṣatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*) while offering water sacred to their Manes offer him also water. No Indian has received such an honour. That is why the entire world even now calls him by the name ‘Grandfather’. The heirlessness of Bhīṣma is really a matter of envy for persons having even many sons.



Yudhiṣṭhira—The Pious One

Like Bhīṣma king Yudhiṣṭhira was also a very high soul. He was born of a fraction of *Dharmarāja*. He was an embodiment of *Dharma*. That is why people call him *Dharmarāja*—He was possessed of a number of divine qualities such as forbearance, steadfastness, endurance, humility, compassion and an unshakable love etc. Even in his childhood he had gained great popularity through his modesty, good conduct and thoughtful nature. When he was quite young his father Pāṇḍu, a great soul, left for his celestial abode. Since then he would regard his senior uncle Dhṛtarāṣṭra as his father and developed a great respect for him and never disobeyed him. But Dhṛtarāṣṭra being crooked by nature began to nurse a grudge against him on account of repeatedly hearing the praises for his good qualities. His son Duryodhana hatched the desire that if somehow the *Pāṇḍavas* left Hastināpura for some time he should usurp their hereditary rights in their absence and become the virtual king. He gave such a suggestion to his blind and impudent father so as to veer round to his view. Dhṛtarāṣṭra summoned the *Pāṇḍavas* and proposed that they should go to Vāraṇāvata

to visit the fair. Regarding it as his order they did not raise any objection and in all submission went to Vāraṇāvata along with their mother Kuntī. In order to burn them alive Duryodhana had got built over there a house made of lac. They were asked to stay in it. With the help of uncle Vidura, they could somehow manage to escape from there to save their lives and took shelter in a forest. Subsequently the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra taking them to be dead, secretly took the reigns of Hastināpura in their hands.

Later on, on the occasion of Draupadī's *Svayamvara* when the secret about the *Pāṇḍavas* came to light, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra came to know that the *Pāṇḍavas* were still alive. Dhṛtarāṣṭra sent message through Vidura and called the *Pāṇḍavas* to him and in order to settle the dispute between his sons and the *Pāṇḍavas*, proposed to them to accept half of the territory and settle themselves in Khāṇḍavaprastha. Yudhiṣṭhira regarding it as his order accepted this proposal as well and he started living at Khāṇḍavaprastha along with his brothers. There he got built for himself a separate capital which was named as Indraprastha. There he performed *Rājasūya Yajña* which was attended by a number of kings who offered him valuable presents and acknowledged him as their emperor.

But the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra would not let them live peacefully even there. Duryodhana grew jealous of

their prosperity. Having built a large central hall he invited the *Pāṇḍavas* for gambling. Though knowing that the gambling is an evil but regarding it as the order of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Yudhiṣṭhira accepted his invitation and by the deceitful tricks of Duryodhana's maternal uncle Śakuni, lost his all; the worse of all this was that the chief queen Draupadī had to suffer great humiliation in the crowded hall. Still the feelings of Yudhiṣṭhira for Dhṛtarāṣṭra did not undergo any change. Dhṛtarāṣṭra too was good enough to restore them their territory and all the money and sent them back to Indraprastha. But Duryodhana could not tolerate all this. He induced Dhṛtarāṣṭra and obtained his consent to call the *Pāṇḍavas* through a messenger and this time the game of dice should be played once again on the condition of 'banishment.' Yudhiṣṭhira had once seen the evil consequences of gambling and was in the know of their intention still he could not overlook the order of his senior uncle and breaking his journey midway returned to him. This time too it was Yudhiṣṭhira who lost the game and consequently giving up his all he with his brothers and chief queen Draupadī was obliged to go to the forest on exile for twelve years and to live incognito for a year. As an obligation to fulfil the duty of obedience to father he silently suffered all that came his way. Hail to such a devotion to one's father!

King Yudhiṣṭhira was tolerant and very cautious

about the discharge of his duties. He could bear to suffer any loss but the lapse in *Dharma* was unbearable to him. For the first time in gambling when he lost his four brothers, his own self and even Draupadī and the *Kauravas* started humiliating Draupadī in the crowded hall, he did not utter a word for he stood duty-bound, he endured everything without a murmur. Even an ordinary person cannot bear to see his wife suffering atrocities in that way. It was out of fear for him, his brothers dared not speak a word and could not give vent to their suppressed feelings. Had they so desired they could have stopped the inhuman atrocities by use of force but considering the fact that Dharmarāja had lost Draupadī at stake by his own sweet will they remained silent. The selfsame Draupadī the casting of an evil look at whom could be ground enough for one to be deprived of one's life, was now being reduced to a pitiable condition in their very presence and the mockery of the situation was that they could not even oppose it. Yudhiṣṭhira was aware of the fact that he was deceitfully defeated by Śakuni still he did not think it proper to give up *Dharma* at his will. Putting up with all odds he did not give up the cause of truth and duty. A better example of one's love of *Dharma* and tolerance can hardly be found in the world.

When the *Pāṇḍavas* having lost the stake for the second time proceeded towards the forest, the inhabitants

of Hastināpura felt very unhappy. They began to curse the *Kauravas* and giving up their hearth and home a considerable number of citizens followed them with a view to accompany them to the forest. Even then *Dharmarāja* did not utter a word against the *Kauravas* and with great effort persuaded all of them to return. Still a number of *Brāhmaṇas* followed them against their wish. At that moment *Dharmarāja* was a little concerned as to how he would manage to provide food to so many *Brāhmaṇas* who followed him. He was a little concerned about his own troubles but he could not bear to see others in trouble. However he became successful in obtaining through worship from Sun-god such a pot as would make even a little food cooked in it inexhaustible. During his stay in the forest he would first feed the *Brāhmaṇas* who guested and then himself took food. Even while himself experiencing the inconveniences of the forest life he did not fail to accord due hospitality to guests. Being attracted to him by his love of *Dharma* which found expression in that sort of behaviour, the great sages would come to stay with him during his exile and would perform *Yajña* and other sorts of religious observances.

King Yudhiṣṭhira was popularly known as *Ajātaśatru* (a man having no enemy at all). In fact he was not unfriendly to anyone. He ever entertained good-will even for those who bore hostility to him. In his view

even the enemies deserved service and sympathy. To do good to the evil-doers is an important mark of a saint.

उमा संत कइ इहइ बड़ाई। मंद करत जो करइ भलाई ॥

“O Umā, the greatness of a saint lies in the fact that he does good even to the evil-doers.”

This saying of Goswāmī Tulasīdāsa is fully exemplified in the character of king Yudhiṣṭhira. Once it so happened that when the *Pāṇḍavas* were staying in Dvaitavana, Duryodhana accompanied by ministers, brothers, the ladies of the apartment, a large army reached the forest with a vile view to make the *Pāṇḍavas* envious of his glory. There he arrived at the pool to play in the waters on whose bank lived Yudhiṣṭhira in a cottage made for himself. Now this pool was already encircled by the demi-gods. Duryodhana entered into a conflict with them. In no time a very terrible and horripilant battle started between them. However the *Gandharvas* (the demi-gods) came out victorious. They took under their custody not only Duryodhana but his queens also. When king Yudhiṣṭhira came to know about it he ordered his brothers to get king Duryodhana liberated by force. “Taking it for granted that they are hostile to us, they are undoubtedly in trouble” said he. “At present it is our solemn duty to help them out dismissing from our minds their evil doings. Hostile though they are, they are undoubtedly our kith and kin. How can we tolerate seeing them ill-treated by

others.” In no time Arjuna overpowered *Gandharvas* by showering arrows and freed Duryodhana as well as his brothers and queens from their captivity. Having come to know about the conspiracy designed by Duryodhana, it was Indra the presiding deity, who had intentionally deputed the *Gandharvas* to make Duryodhana captive and bring him there. They were wonder-struck to see the large heartedness of king Yudhiṣṭhira. Blessed be the state of having no enemy.

Once upon a time leaving behind Draupadī alone in the hermitage the *Pāṇḍavas* went into the forest. Soon Jayadratha the king of Sindhu, and brother-in-law of Duryodhana came up there. Seeing the matchless grace and beauty of Draupadī an evil desire arose in his heart. He put forth his sinful intention before Draupadī but she scornfully turned down his proposal. Then he forcibly dragged Draupadī and hurling her into the chariot made off with her. Later on, when the *Pāṇḍavas* came to know of his misconduct they chased him and before long seized him. It took the *Pāṇḍavas* no time to destroy his army completely. Sinful Jayadratha being afraid let Draupadī step down from his chariot and himself ran away for his life. Bhīmasena ran after him and having captured him before long, presented him before *Dharmarāja*. In consideration of the fact that he was a relative *Dharmarāja* took pity on him and let him go and thus showed an extraordinary sense

of forgiveness and compassion.

King Yudhiṣṭhira was not only a profound scholar and well-versed in ethics and *Dharma* but also had excellent sense of equanimity. Once in the forest where the *Pāṇḍavas* dwelt a deer was trying to remove the itching sensation of his horns by rubbing them against the churning wood with its string, belonging to a *Brāhmaṇa* which were suspended on a tree. The wooden churner got stuck into his horns. The deer ran away with it. Finding it difficult to perform *Agnihotra* (offering oblations to the fire) the Brahmin approached the *Pāṇḍavas* and prayed them to bring back the wooden churner. *Dharmarāja* Yudhiṣṭhira with his four brothers ran after the deer but in the twinkling of an eye, it disappeared from their sight.

The *Pāṇḍavas* were very much tired besides being overpowered with thirst. At the behest of *Dharmarāja*, Nakula went out in search of water. Not far away from there he came upon a beautiful pool. Advancing towards it no sooner did he bend down to drink water then he heard an oracle—"First answer my questions then you may drink water." But Nakula was overpowered with thirst. He paid no heed to that oracle. As a result, as soon as he drank water he lay down dead. Then *Dharmarāja* sent Sahadeva, Arjuna and Bhīmasena one by one but all the three met the same fate. At last *Dharmarāja* himself arrived at the pool. He too heard

similar warning and noticed his four brothers lying motionless on the ground. Meanwhile he spied a huge *Yakṣa* (a demi-god). He told Yudhiṣṭhira that his brothers were reduced to such a miserable condition only on account of drinking water without answering my questions and warned that he would be doomed if he also tried to act in an unsightful manner. Yudhiṣṭhira expressed his consent to answer his questions. Yudhiṣṭhira befittingly answered to the satisfaction of *Yakṣa* all the questions asked by him. Being pleased with his answers the *Yakṣa* said—"O King, I shall revive anyone of your brothers, you want to be revived. *Dharmarāja* expressed the desire that he wanted to see Nakula alive. On being interrogated about his choice he said—"My father had two wives—Kuntī and Mādri. The two are equal in my eyes. I wish that each of them should have one son. I am the son of Kuntī and am alive so I desire that one of Mādri's sons should also remain alive. That is why I have expressed my preference for Nakula instead of Bhīma or Arjuna." This divine play was enacted by *Dharma* embodied in order to test the wisdom and Yudhiṣṭhira's dedication to *Dharma*. He was much pleased on noticing such a marvellous sense of equanimity displayed by Yudhiṣṭhira and having revealed his identity to him revived all of his four brothers. *Dharma* further said—"It was I who took away the wooden churner belonging to the *Brāhmaṇa*. Here it is you can take it."

Having approached the *Brāhmaṇa*, Yudhiṣṭhira returned him the wooden churner.

Yudhiṣṭhira was not only a man of virtuous conduct but also modest. He was very skilled in shaping his behaviour appropriate to the occasion. He was always conscious in offering due respect to elderly people. He did not fail to observe social decorum even in the most strained circumstances. Prior to the breaking out of the battle of *Mahābhārata* when the two armies stood facing each other ready to fight, he entered the enemy forces and made obeisance to grandfather Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpācārya, the preceptors and maternal uncle Śalya and craved for their blessings. All of these elderly people were very glad at his humility and behaviour worthy of cultured people and from the core of their hearts wished for his victory. All the four persons expressed regret for fighting under compulsion on behalf of *Kauravas* who were unjust, and considered it as their weakness. This ideal behaviour of Yudhiṣṭhira was approved by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa himself.

As far as the truthfulness of Yudhiṣṭhira is concerned it was universally acknowledged. He would never resort to falsehood for fear or greed. It was the fruit of his truthfulness that the wheels of his chariot always rolled on a little above the ground.

He uttered a lie only once during his life time. On the

pretext of the death of Aśvatthāmā, the elephant, he falsely declared before Droṇācārya that Aśvatthāmā (the son of Droṇa was dead). On account of this deviation from truth made only once during his life time the wheels of his chariot started rolling on in close proximity to the ground and he was obliged to have a look at the scene—pseudo-hell though for a moment.

Marvellous was the Yudhiṣṭhira's magnanimity. When the *Kauravas* became adamant not to return their territory he agreed to remain contented even if only five villages were released in his favour and sent the message to Duryodhana through Lord Kṛṣṇa that he could refrain from fighting if he accepted their proposal of transferring of five villages to them. But Duryodhana refused to give them in measure to the point of needle-bit of land. Consequently they were forced to fight. Further, when Duryodhana's entire army having been utterly destroyed and he himself sought shelter in a tank, Yudhiṣṭhira arrived at the tank and challenging him for the last time to a duel said—"You can enter into a combat with anyone of your choice. In case you come out victorious in the duel with any of us you will be entitled to the entire territory." Who else can dare offer to make such a proposal? It was the work of a high souled personage like Yudhiṣṭhira to put such a proposal before Duryodhana to combat with whom in the mace-fight even Bhīma who was the strongest

of all the *Pāṇḍavas*, hesitated. At last it was decided that he would enter into combat with Bhīmasena and he was killed by Bhīmasena.

Moreover at the end of the war when Yudhiṣṭhira being coronated to the kingdom when Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī began to live with him, he treated them in such a nice way that they forgot the bereavement of their own sons. They afforded them such comforts as could not be provided with even by their own sons. He sought their advice in managing the affairs of the state and would find out time to serve them. His mother Kuntī, empress Draupadī with her daughters-in-law served Gāndhārī, the revered lady. He was always on the alert that no such occurrence should take place in their presence as might arise in their hearts sorrow for their deceased sons. Yudhiṣṭhira became much grieved when towards the end of their lives they decided to dwell in forest. He himself became ready to follow them to the forest. With great difficulty Vyāsajī tried to bring him round only then he agreed to send Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī to the forest. Nevertheless Kuntī Devī did follow her husband's brother and his wife to the forest, lived in their company till the end attending on them and breathed her last with them also. Before leaving for the forest Dhṛtarāṣṭra desired to perform for the last time in the prescribed manner *Śrāddha* ceremony in favour of his dead sons and other

relatives and also desired to give away unlimited charities to the *Brāhmaṇas* for their sake. When Yudhiṣṭhira learnt about his desire he sent words through Vidurajī alongwith Arjuna that his all including his life were at his disposal. He made necessary arrangements to enable him to spend money more liberally than he desired. Under such circumstances Dhṛtarāṣṭra very ceremoniously performed *Śrāddha* for the sake of his relatives and gave away charities to the *Brāhmaṇas* to the satisfaction of his heart. At the orders of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Yudhiṣṭhira literally let the money flow from the royal treasury like a river. Those who were ordered to be given hundred were given a thousand. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī set out for the forest the *Pāṇḍavas* alongwith their queens went a long way to see them off. It was the work of none else but of an exalted soul like Yudhiṣṭhira to try his best to provide the amenities of life till the very end and entertain in his heart such firm love for the selfsame Dhṛtarāṣṭra on whose account he had to pass through a number of trying circumstances; on whose account he was deprived of his hereditary rights and had to undergo the hardships of banishment more than once and again in whose presence Draupadī the paragon of chastity and devotedness to her husbands, was humiliated in the crowded assembly hall by his sons and was reduced to abject poverty; who refrained from giving

him even five villages which resulted in such a terrible massacre of a number of men on both sides. The example of entertaining such good-will even for one's enemy is rarely to be found in the history of the world.

Still extraordinary was king Yudhiṣṭhira's affection and love for those taking refuge in him. He was greatly shocked to hear about the departure of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa to His supreme abode and the extermination of the *Yādavas*. He began to reflect that the happiness of kingly life was of little avail to him nay, meaningless is even to sustain this life since Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa who was his own kith and kin and well-wisher and by whose grace he had achieved everything, had departed from the world. Let alone the consideration of Śrī Kṛṣṇa who was the very life-breath and the be-all and end-all of the life of the *Pāṇḍavas* who were totally dependent on him in every matter, he was so deeply shocked at the extermination of the *Kauravas* that instead of rejoicing at the victory and the installation as the king that giving up his all he decided to proceed to the forest. With great difficulty and through hard persuasion could Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the great sage Vyāsa and others succeed in making him agreeable for the coronation. Bhīṣma *Pitāmaha* also tried to remove his remorse by exhorting him on matters relating to *Dharma* and he did rule his kingdom on receiving the counsel of Bhīṣma but the feeling of remorse that

aroused in his heart due to assassination of his kith and kin could never be totally done away with. And now on having heard the news of the departure of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to his supreme abode he firmly decided to go to the forest. Enthroning Parīkṣit, the grand son of Arjuna and deputing Kṛpācārya and Yuyutsu, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra as his caretakers and taking with him his four brothers and Draupadī set out from Hastināpura. Going around many countries with the aim of circumambulating the earth (a kind of religious rite) he crossed the Himalayas and made his way towards the mountain called Meru. On the way Draupadī and his four brothers dropped down dead one by one. Not caring for their fall Yudhiṣṭhira proceeded on and on. Meanwhile Indra, the presiding deity seated in his chariot came to receive him and asked to ascend the chariot. Yudhiṣṭhira demurred taking seat in the chariot bereaved as he was for his brothers and the virtuous lady Draupadī who regarded him as her life-breath. He consented to ascend chariot only when Indra assured him that they had already arrived at the celestial regions before him. But he had with him a dog too who had been accompanying ever since he started on the journey. Yudhiṣṭhira desired that the dog too should accompany him onwards. When Indra objected to it he frankly told him that he was not ready to enter the celestial regions leaving behind his faithful dog. This

dog was none else but *Dharma* himself who was accompanying Yudhiṣṭhira in order to test him. Noticing this matchless affectionateness of Yudhiṣṭhira for those taking shelter with him he revealed himself in his proper form and making Yudhiṣṭhira sit in the chariot in the company of Indra and other gods and celestial sages entered the upper regions. On that occasion celestial sage Nārada said these words in his praise—“Before Yudhiṣṭhira none is said to have ascended the celestial abode with his physical frame.” Ascending up Yudhiṣṭhira looked upon the stars and planets as realms belonging to different gods. Still he said to Indra, the presiding deity, only this much—“Take me to that realm where I should find my brothers and Devī Draupadī for I shall find peace there and there alone. Of what avail is the celestial abode to me where I may not find my brothers?” Hail to such a love for one’s brothers!

Farther on he happened to come across the sights of hell created through illusion by Indra, the presiding deity and there he heard the sound of moaning and groaning of his bretheren. He also heard people say—“Sire, stop for a while your stay here relieves us of the tortures of hell.” Then he stopped there and to the angel who lead him to that place he said—“I must stop here. Since the creatures living here feel happy by my stay here, then this hell to me is far better than the

celestial abode. Hail to such compassionateness!

Soon the sight disappeared and Indra and other gods arrived there. All of them were very glad at the expression of such sentiments. They said to him—“Falsely you assured Droṇācārya of his son’s death. The sights of hell shown to you were also illusory. All your brothers have arrived in the celestial realms.” Thereafter Yudhiṣṭhira entered the supreme abode of the Lord and there he had vision of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa in His same form in which he would see Him previously in this mortal world. There he saw Arjuna also attending on the Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He also came across Draupadī and his brothers at other places. At last he merged himself with his father the embodied *Dharma*. Thus Yudhiṣṭhira attained supreme state by virtue of observance of *Dharma*.

So marvellous was the impact of Yudhiṣṭhira’s piety that the place he visited was permeated with piety. At the time when the *Pāṇḍavas* were living incognito in the palace of king Virāṭa the *Kauravas* tried to trace him out. In that context grandfather Bhīṣma who knew the glory of the *Pāṇḍavas* told them that the generality of the men where Yudhiṣṭhira would be staying, must be generous in giving away charities, sweet tongued, exercising control over sense-organs and modest by nature. They would be freed from such evils as spite, arrogance, envy etc. That place will ever be echoing

with the recitation of the *Vedic Mantras*, *Yajñas* would be performed, the place would be having rain fall at the proper time, that place would have abundance of grains and riches and free from fear of all sorts and natural calamities and the cows would be stout and innumerable. Moreover as has been narrated above even the dwellers of hell enjoyed peace and happiness in their association with him, King Nahuṣa who had to take birth in the family of pythons on account of the curse of the great *Ṛṣi* Agastya and who had in that very form caught hold of Bhīma in his clutches sought emancipation from that form through the *Darśana* of and a conversation with Yudhiṣṭhira and attained the celestial regions thereafter. The more we study the character of king Yudhiṣṭhira and dwell upon it the more pious shall we become.

धर्मो विवर्द्धति युधिष्ठिरकीर्तनेन ।

“*Dharma* flourishes through singing the praise of Yudhiṣṭhira.”



Arjuna—The Bravest of the Brave

Arjuna was the very incarnation of *Ṛṣi* named Nara. He was a great devotee of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and also His friend and lover and a good instrument in his hand. In the battle of *Mahābhārata*, by making him His instrument the Lord had slain many great warriors and in this way He relieved the earth of its burden—the supreme goal of His manifestation. On the occasion of revealing His Form Universal, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa has acknowledged this saying—“These enemies of yours already stand slain by me. You have to be only an instrument in slaying them” (XI.33). Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa has accepted him as a friend and devotee by acclaiming in the *Gītā* itself—“You are my friend and devotee too. You are extremely dear to Me and so on. He, whom the Lord Himself accepts as his friend and beloved one and declares him as such, requires no further proof of his devotion. In the concluding part of the *Gītā*, while promising—“I shall carry out your bidding” Arjuna himself pledged to be an instrument of the Lord and a careful study of the *Mahābhārata* confirms the fact that he is very particular about fulfilling his promise till the end. The *Gītā* further bears out the fact that he looked upon Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa as his friend and regarded Him as his equal. Arjuna and

Śrī Kṛṣṇa lived together for many months at various places and on such occasions it was but natural for them to sit, to walk, to eat and drink and to lie and sleep together and as such there was no scope for the observance of formalities in their mutual behaviour. They made frank dealings with each other, there was intimate cordiality between them and they had free access to the inner apartment of each other's palaces where they stayed and moved together and no privacy was observed by them in respect of each other. The sort of love they had for each other is reported by Sañjaya at the time of delivering the message of *Pāṇḍavas* to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. When the battle had not yet started Sañjaya went to the *Pāṇḍavas* in Upaplavya with the message of the *Kauravas*. The informal state in which he found Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is reported to the king thus—"Sire, to deliver the message to Arjuna, I entered the inner apartment, access to which place was forbidden even to Abhimanyu, Nakula and Sahadeva. There I saw Kṛṣṇa stretching his legs in the lap of Arjuna and Arjuna stretching his in the lap of Draupadī and Satyabhāmā."

When the *Pāṇḍavas* repaired to the forest as per terms of gambling, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa visited them. On this occasion He refers to his own identification with Arjuna and affirms—"I am solely yours and you are solely Mine. Those, whom you regard as your own, are Mine and those whom, I regard as Mine, are yours.

He, who envies you, envies Me and he who envies Me, envies you and he, who loves you, loves Me. You are Nara and I am Nārāyaṇa. I am identified with you even so you are identified with Me. We are not at variance with each other. We are essentially one.” Many events in *Mahābhārata* reveal to us how dearly Śrī Kṛṣṇa loved Arjuna and what great intimacy existed between them. During the period of exile when Arjuna reached Prabhāsakṣetra in connection with the pilgrimage, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa on hearing of him soon leaves Dwārakā for Prabhāsakṣetra in order to meet him and having brought him from there to mount Raivataka, spends many days there in his company. From the mount Raivataka the two come to Dwārakā where Arjuna stays for many days in the palace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as his favourite guest and at night both sleep together. There when he comes to know that Arjuna wants to marry His sister Subhadrā, he consents to it without being asked and also tells him the device of abducting her by force. Not only this much he gives him His chariot and His weapon as well. When Balarāmajī opposes this he persuades him and obtains his consent to it and it is at Dwārakā that the marriage of Subhadrā is solemnized. Again in the context of the great fire at Khāṇḍava, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa prays to Indra for the boon of ever increasing friendship with Arjuna. In that very context we find another example of great intimacy between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. A demon named Maya

was trying to escape from the terrible fire that had blazed forth in the forest of Khāṇḍava. The Fire-god in his divine manifestation was chasing him in order to burn him to ashes. Śrī Kṛṣṇa too with His discus rushed to help Fire-god kill him. Finding no means of escape he took shelter with Arjuna who granted him 'Abhayadāna' (freedom from all fears). Now Śrī Kṛṣṇa withdrew His discus and Fire-god ceased chasing him. The life of Maya, the demon, was saved. Maya, the demon, wanted to render Arjuna some service in return for his kindness. Arjuna said that he would be duly served only if he served Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Maya, the demon, was a skilled architect. Śrī Kṛṣṇa got a very beautiful assembly hall built by him for emperor Yudhiṣṭhira. Thus Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna always tried to do things that were pleasing to each other.

Just as Śrī Kṛṣṇa loved Arjuna so also Arjuna considered him as his dearest kinsman and well-wisher. That was why he preferred, alone Śrī Kṛṣṇa without arms as his helper to His army consisting of a thousand million soldiers. When choice is to be made between the Lord and His bounteous gifts the true devotee leaving aside His gifts, chooses the Lord Himself. Being overwhelmed with the feeling of love, Śrī Kṛṣṇa consented to be his charioteer on the battlefield. Entrusting also the reigns of the chariot of his life to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna freed himself from anxiety forever. Now the responsibility of Arjuna's protection and

victory was shifted on the shoulders of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the omnipotent Lord. It is His pledge that if one meditates on with undivided mind and leaves all matters of concern to Him, He takes upon Himself the task of looking after one's best interests and needs. One may test the veracity of such a pledge by surrendering himself to Him.

How fine it was. Now the entire responsibility of helping Arjuna to come out victorious and protecting him from terribly powerful warriors like Bhīṣma came on the shoulders of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Nevertheless it was presupposed that the *Pāṇḍavas* would come out victorious for *Dharma* was on their side i.e., their cause was just. Kṛṣṇa is always on the side of *Dharma* and where there is Kṛṣṇa, there is victory—this is a perpetual truth. To make Arjuna invoke Raṇacaṇḍī, the goddess of war, just before the beginning of war and sing hymns to her in order to gain her favour in defeating the enemies and to crave for her blessings after having the vision of her manifest form, to remove his delusion through the teachings of the *Gītā* and granting him the vision of the Cosmic Form; to rush at Bhīṣma for protecting the life of Arjuna, helpless as he was in defending himself against the shower of arrows upon him by Bhīṣma in the first instance with the wheel and in the second instance, with a lash in His hand to the utter neglect of the pledge that He would not lift weapons during the battle; to endure against his chest

the evil effect of Vaiṣṇavāstra hurled by Bhagadatta the all devastating weapon, to save Arjuna from the serpent mouthed arrow hurled by Karna by pressing the chariot hard under His feet and to keep in order Arjuna's chariot which was almost burnt by the impact of the arrows, through His firm resolve these and such others were the divine sports of Śrī Kṛṣṇa which he performed for safeguarding the best interests and needs of Arjuna.

Nine days had passed but the battle between Bhīṣma and the *Pāṇḍavas* had not ended. Still Bhīṣma's military prowess was not on the decline. Daily he was killing thousands of warriors of the *Pāṇḍava* army. The *Pāṇḍavas* were in a fix how to gain victory over him. In a pathetic tone Yudhiṣṭhira narrated the whole circumstances to Śrī Kṛṣṇa who was at the helm of all affairs. Whatever Śrī Kṛṣṇa said in order to console him, reveals His extraordinary love for Arjuna. At the same time it also reveals that he held Arjuna in a very high esteem. Śrī Kṛṣṇa spoke thus: *Dharmarāja*, you need not worry at all, You feel that victory will be ensured with the slaying of Bhīṣma. I can by Myself put an end to his life. Your brother Arjuna is my friend, kinsman and disciple as well, if needed I am ready to cut the flesh of my body for his sake and he too can give up his life for My sake. In *Upaplavya* Arjuna had taken vow in the presence of all to kill Bhīṣma and I have to see that it is not broken. I must do

whatever Arjuna asks Me to do. Moreover, it is not at all difficult for Arjuna to kill Bhīṣma. O king, if Arjuna makes up his mind, he can perform even an impossible task. If all the gods accompanied by giants and demons stand against Arjuna in the battlefield, Arjuna can defeat them all, far less to speak of Bhīṣma alone. It is true that nothing is impossible for one who is protected and helped by the Lord who is capable of doing and undoing as well as averting the destiny.

Tormented with the bereavement of his son Abhimanyu and holding Jayadratha mainly responsible for Abhimanyu's death overwhelmed with emotions Arjuna makes a pledge of killing Jayadratha before the sunset and at the same time he also pledges that in case he failed to do so by the next evening he would fling himself into fire. According to the words of the Lord viz., "I safeguard the best interests and needs of My devotees the responsibility of the fulfilment of Arjuna's pledge falls on the shoulders of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna was carefree as he exclusively depended on Lord Kṛṣṇa. On the other side, however, no efforts were spared to safeguard the life of Jayadratha. The same day Śrī Kṛṣṇa awoke at midnight and calling to him, Dāruka the charioteer, said—"Dāruka, wife, friends, brothers and kinsmen—none of these is dearer to Me than Arjuna, I cannot bear the sight of the world bereft of Arjuna even for a moment. Such a thing will never happen. Only tomorrow the world will get a proof of

my friendship with Arjuna. He who is envious of him envies Me also. He, who is favourable to him, is favourable to Me also. Grasp it fully well that Arjuna is half of my body. I believe, tomorrow Arjuna will be successful in killing any of the warriors he chooses to kill." What doubt could there be in the victory of one to whom the Lord, favourably disposed to His friends, is so favourably inclined. The next day Arjuna fulfilled his promise by killing Jayadratha through the device suggested by Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the world stood witness to the fact that Arjuna was not the least harmed.

Karṇa was envious of Arjuna since the very beginning. Both were at daggers drawn with each other. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa thought that after the death of Bhīṣma the greatest danger to the life of Arjuna was only from Karṇa. He had an unfailable and powerful missile bestowed to him by Indra which he kept reserved for being used against Arjuna. Being in possession of that divine power he considered Arjuna's life at his mercy. It could be used only once. To deprive Karṇa of that miraculous power, the Lord made Ghaṭotkaca, the son of Bhīmasena, fight with him. He displayed such a marvellous valour that the life of Karṇa seemed to be at stake. Unable to endure his strokes and finding no way out Karṇa had to use the powerful missile given by Indra, against Ghaṭotkaca and it put an end to his life. The event of the death of Ghaṭotkaca enveloped the encampments of the

Pāṇḍava army with a gloom. Tears burst out from every eye. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa was much pleased at this event. He began to dance with joy. Embracing Arjuna he patted him on his back and made repeated outcry. Arjuna enquired of Him about the cause of His untimely joy for he knew that no activity of the Lord was unmotivated. Whatever Śrī Kṛṣṇa said in reply, reveals His limitless love for Arjuna. He said—O Arjuna, today is, of course, the day of great rejoicing for Me. If you want to know the reason, listen to Me. You think it was Karna who killed Ghaṭotkaca, but I say that on account of the missile given by Indra, made ineffective, it is rather Ghaṭotkaca who has killed Karna. Now you can consider Karna as good as dead. No man had the power to stand against Karna as long as he wielded that missile. He further said: “It was for your welfare that I got Jarāsandha, Śiśupāla and others slain one by one. Had they not been slain earlier they would have posed a grave threat now. Having enmity with us they would surely have sided with the *Kauravas* and with the support of Duryodhana, they would have conquered the entire earth. I have manifested myself only to kill such people as are enemies of gods.” It was in this very context that he said to Sātyaki—“Everyone on the side of the *Kauravas* advised Karna not to use the missile against anyone else except Arjuna. He too had it in his mind all the time but it was I who would put him in a dilemma. That is why

he could not use the missile against Arjuna. O Sātyaki, “The idea that this missile is nothing but the death itself for Arjuna—haunted in my mind and I had to spend sleepless nights. Having been used against Ghaṭotkaca this day, it has been rendered of no further use now I think that Arjuna is free from the jaws of death. I regard the safeguarding of Arjuna’s life more significant than safeguarding the lives of my own parents and relatives like you; nay even My own life. Bereft of Arjuna, I do not aspire for anything whatsoever, be it rarer though than even the kingship of the three worlds. As much I am puffed up with joy as though Arjuna has gained a new lease of life. That is why I deputed Ghaṭotkaca to enter into a combat with Karna this night. None but he could overpower Karna.” These words of the Lord reveal how dearly He loved Arjuna and how careful He was about his safeguard. The best interests of the man who makes himself an instrument of the Lord whosoever he may be is safeguarded in this way by the Lord and he is protected by Him from all sorts of harms. Foolish must be the men who, forsaking the resort to the Lord who is so affectionately disposed to His devotees, seek shelter in others.

Driven to anger by the slaying of Droṇācārya, valiant Aśwatthāmā used Āgneyāstra (the weapon causing fire) against the *Pāṇḍavas*. As soon as it was shot, showers of arrows hailed down from above and fire spread on all sides. Followed by an Akṣauhiṇī army

(A mixed unit of army composed of 21,870 chariots as many elephants, 65,610 horses and 1,09,350 foot) Arjuna alone was pitched against Aśwatthāmā, terribly hit by that weapon his army was so badly scorched and burnt that it was driven out of extinction but the bodies of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were not the least affected. Aśwatthāmā was amazed and worried as to how the two great souls could afford to be unaffected. Casting away the bow from his hand he jumped off the chariot and left the battlefield crying out; 'Fie! Fie!' Meanwhile he came across Vyāsajī. He made obeisance to him and asked him how it was that Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were not the least affected by that all devastating weapon. Vyāsajī said—"Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the manifestation of the Ṛṣi named 'Nārāyaṇa' and Arjuna is the manifestation of the Ṛṣi named 'Nara' and is as glorious as 'Nārāyaṇa' himself. These two Ṛṣis manifest themselves age after age to keep people within the proper limits of righteousness. Hearing these words of Vyāsajī, Aśwatthāmā's doubts were removed and he developed an esteem for Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. These words of Vyāsajī go to prove the identification of Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

As it was, Arjuna was the favourite of Śrī Kṛṣṇa but he enjoyed the inordinate grace of Lord Śaṅkara as well. During the battle when he was wrecking havoc on the opposite army he always noticed a sublime person like fire ablaze, always moving in front of

chariot. In fact it was He who was destroying the enemy forces but people wrongly credited Arjuna for the work. He was invested with a three forked lance (Trident) and was refulgent like the sun. During the conversation with Vyāsajī, he told Arjuna that he was none else but Śaṅkara himself. There is nothing to wonder at if others bestow their grace on one who enjoys the favour of Lord Kṛṣṇa—“जा पर कृपा राम कै होई । ता पर कृपा करहिं सब कोई ॥” (He who enjoys the favour of Lord Rāma virtually receives the favour of all.)

Besides being a great devotee and favourite of the Lord, Arjuna had many other virtues also. It was but natural; just as shafts of light accompany the sun, so also other divine virtues concord with adoration of the Lord. He was patient, brave, compassionate, tender-hearted, true to his vows and exercised control over his senses. He had in him inborn divine qualities. Śrī Kṛṣṇa has affirmed this in the *Gītā* saying—“सम्पदं दैवीमभिजातोऽसि”. At the time of his birth a oracle spoke—O Kuntī, this child will grow to be as valiant as Kārtavīrya Arjuna and Lord Śaṅkara and shall enhance your prestige by becoming unconquerable like Indra. Just as Viṣṇu had pleased his mother Aditi, in the same way he will provide you joy.” This voice was not only heard by Kuntī but by all. The sages, the gods and all living beings were pleased to hear this. Trumpets were blown from above and flowers were strown. In this way his divinity was evident since his very birth.

When he grew up the task of teaching him, his brothers and Duryodhana etc., the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra was first entrusted to Kṛpācārya and then to Droṇācārya. Karna commonly known as *Sūtaputra* (the son of the *Sūta*) also received his education along with Arjuna. Of all the disciples of Droṇācārya Arjuna alone surpassed all in the field of education, physical power, effortfulness, swiftness and adroitness and in the exercise of all types of weapons. He served Droṇācārya whole heartedly. Being pleased with his service, devotedness and intelligence, one day Droṇācārya said to him—"I shall see that no man in the world stands a match for you in archery." Can the firm resolve of an accomplished preceptor like Droṇācārya ever remain unfulfilled?" Arjuna indeed turned out as the best archer in the world.

When the *Pāṇḍava* and the *Kaurava* princes completed practice in the exercise of weapons and the occasion for paying the fee to the preceptor cropped up, Droṇa, the preceptor, said to them—"Make Drupada, the king of Pāñcāla, a captive in the battlefield and bring him here—this would be the best fee that you can possibly pay me." All of them cheerfully agreed to carry out the orders of their preceptor and having equipped themselves with proper arms and riding in chariot invaded the capital of king Drupada. When they reached there the king of Pāñcāla accompanied by his brothers encountered them. At first the *Kauravas* had

made an attack on him all by themselves but were obliged to retreat after being defeated by the king of Pāñcāla. Lastly Arjuna accompanied by Nakula and Sahadeva attacked king Drupada. In the twinkling of an eye Arjuna overpowered king Drupada and making him a captive escorted him to Droṇācārya. This event earned Arjuna a universal recognition of his valour.

Having come to know about the *Swayamvara* of Draupadī the *Pāṇḍavas* were on their way to the capital of Drupada from Ekacakrā. On the way they had an encounter with the *Gandharvas*. With his skill in the use of weapons, Arjuna fully overpowered the *Gandharvas* and made their king Aṅgārāparṇa (Citraratha) their captive. At last they came to be on friendly terms with each other. In the *Swayamvara* of Draupadī Arjuna, to the surprise of all performed the task which none of the kings present in the *Swayamvara* could do. Duryodhana, Śālva, Śiśupāla, Jarāsandha, Śalya and other valiant kings and princes tried to take up the bow and draw its string but all of them failed. But in no time did Arjuna take up the bow, drew up the string and in the twinkling of an eye pierced the target through. At that time Arjuna had disguised himself as a *Brāhmaṇa*. Taking him as a *Brāhmaṇa* all the kings joined together to overcome him. But they could not do even the least harm to either Arjuna or Bhīma. At that time Arjuna was engaged in bow fight with Karṇa and Bhīma was engaged to Śalya in the mace fight.

But the rival combatents had to suffer defeat at the hands of Arjuna and Bhīma.

In the event of the great conflagration at Khāṇḍava also Arjuna had displayed marvellous prowess. When with the help of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna the Fire-god set the Khāṇḍava forest on fire, being severely oppressed with the great heat the gods approached their king Indra. Then at the command of Indra the clouds joined together and started pouring torrential rain in order to put out the terrible fire. With the miraculous power of his weapon, Arjuna intercepted the torrents mid-way in the sky and did not let them come upon the earth. Indra too retaliated by hurling sharp arrows at Arjuna. Then a fierce battle was fought between the two sides. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna conjointly with the help of the discus and sharp arrows, played havoc on the army of gods. At that time Śrī Kṛṣṇa revealed Himself as 'Death incarnate.' The gods and demons both were wonder struck to see His power. At last the oracle addressing Indra, said—"By no means can you defeat Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the battle. They are the very manifestation of Nara and 'Nārāyaṇa. Limitless is their power and valour. They are unconquerable by one and all. You must depart from here along with all the gods, for your honour lies in this alone." Hearing the oracle, the king of gods retreated with his army and in no time did the fire consume the entire forest. Being pleased with Arjuna the Fire-god bestowed on Arjuna

miraculous weapons. Indra too, being pleased with his skill in the use of weapons, promised to give him weapons at the opportune time and at the request of Fire-god, Varuṇa the water-god bestowed on him an inexhaustible quiver, the *Gāṇḍīva* bow and a chariot invested with banner that was imprinted with the auspicious symbol of monkey even before the battle started.

When the *Pāṇḍavas* having lost second time in the game of dice began to dwell in the forest, (one day) *Maharṣi* Vedavyāsa came to them and escorting Yudhiṣṭhira in seclusion explained to him that Arjuna the constant companion of Nārāyaṇa was none else than the great ascetic 'Nara'. None can overpower him. He is the manifestation of Acyuta. By the dint of his penance and valour he is capable of having the vision of gods. So direct him to Lord Śaṅkara, Indra the king of gods, Varuṇa, Kubera and to *Dharmarāja* for the sake of acquiring the knowledge of weapons. Having received weapons from them he will display great valour, and will restore to you your lost kingdom. Acting on the advice of Vedavyāsajī and having initiated Arjuna into the knowledge of the *Mantras* imparted by him, Yudhiṣṭhira sent Arjuna to mount Indrakīla to have a vision of Indra. On reaching there he had the vision of Indra in the form of an ascetic. Indra tempted him with the allurements of the engagement of heavenly enjoyments and glories but rejecting all,

he insisted on him only to impart him the knowledge of weapons. Indra said—"At first you should have the vision of Lord Śaṅkara through performing penance. Having been blessed with His vision you should come to heaven, then I shall bestow on you all the divine weapons." Arjuna had undoubtedly the sense of dedication to purpose. He was lost in a severe penance. Being pleased with his penance Lord Śaṅkara manifested Himself before him in the form of a Bhīla (a tribe of denizens). A dispute arose between the two over a pig which resulted in a fight. Through his adroitness in the use of weapons he earned the favour of Lord Śaṅkara. He spoke—"O Arjuna, I am pleased at your efficient discharge of the task. There is no *Kṣatriya* as enduring and brave as you. In sublimity and power you are my equal. You are the ever existing *Ṛṣi*. I bestow on you divine knowledge. You shall be able to win over the gods even." Thereafter granting him His vision along with His consort Pārvatī Lord Śaṅkara trained him thoroughly in the use of the *Pāśupata* weapon. Thus having earned the favour of Mahādeva the supreme among gods he was making up his mind to have an access to heaven, when Varuṇa, Kubera, Yama, and Devarāja—the guardians of all the four quarters, presented themselves there. There Yama, Varuṇa and Kubera bestowed on him weapons called *Daṇḍa*, *Pāśa* and *Antardhāna* and Indra promised him to give weapons on his coming to heaven and the knowledge

of archery also. After this seated in chariot sent by Indra, Arjuna went to Heaven and staying there for five years received the training into the use of divine weapons and simultaneously acquired from Citrasena—the knowledge of music as well. After receiving the knowledge when Arjuna became skilled in the use of all sorts of weapons Indra asked him to slay the demons called Nivātakavaca. They lived at an inaccessible place under the waters. They were supposed to be thirty million in number. Even the gods could not overcome them. Arjuna all by himself managed to slay them all. Besides this, while returning he had a fight with the demons named Kālakeya and Pauloma and put an end to their lives too. Thus having done the things desired by Indra and staying in his city called Indrapurī for some time more Arjuna returned to his brothers.

On returning from heaven while living in forest and even while staying at Virāṭanagara incognito Arjuna displayed marvellous valour. In the forest he fought with the *Gandharvas* in order to set Duryodhana and others free from bondage, a reference to which has been made earlier in the context of drawing a character sketch of Yudhiṣṭhira. When the period of twelve years of exile came to an end and the *Pāṇḍavas* were staying with Virāṭa for fulfilling the term of living one year incognito, Duryodhana invaded Virāṭanagara with the motive of tracing them out. He was accompanied by Bhīṣma, Karṇa, Kṛpa, Aśwatthāmā and other chief

warriors. They made their way home gathering round as many as sixty thousand cows of king Virāṭa. Then Uttara, the son of king Virāṭa with Arjuna (disguised as Bṛhannalā) as his charioteer went to intercept their advancement. Uttara's hair stood on an end when he looked at the large army of the *Kauravas* and jumping out of the chariot he took to his heels. Then Bṛhannalā (Arjuna) tried to catch hold of him and brought him round and making him his charioteer, himself began to fight, one by one he defeated Karṇa, Kṛpācārya, Droṇa, Aśwatthāmā and Duryodhana and made Bhīṣma loose his sense. Then Bhīṣma, Duryodhana, Karṇa, Duḥśāsana, Vivimśati, Droṇācārya, Aśwatthāmā and Kṛpācārya all these chief warriors jointly rushed at Arjuna and they surrounded him from all sides but Arjuna swayed them by the showers of his arrows. Lastly he brought out the missile called *Sammohana* (the hypnotizing weapon) which rendered all the *Kaurava* warriors senseless and let the weapons fall off their hands. Had Arjuna so desired he would have killed them all at such a time but he was above all such petty considerations. When they came to sense as advised by Bhīṣma, they thought it desirable to return leaving the cows behind. Trumpeting his victory Arjuna returned to the city. Thus Arjuna paid off many times the debt of one who provided him shelter by saving not only his cows but his prestige also. Blessed be such a faithfulness to one's master.

Arjuna was decidedly one of the important characters of *Mahābhārata*. He was also the chief commander of the *Pāṇḍava* army. It was he whose charioteership was accepted by Lord Kṛṣṇa and it was he again who faced invincible warriors like Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karna and Aśwatthāmā in battle. All of them accepted his supremacy. The valour and skill in use of weapons which he displayed on the day Jayadratha was killed was worthy of him alone. Learning of his pledge that day the *Kauravas* had made Jayadratha stand behind the legions of their army. Making his way through large legions of army consisting of elephantry, cavalry, soldiery and charioteers, Arjuna was steadily advancing towards his goal with firm dedication and indomitable zeal. Thousands of warriors and elephants and horses had fallen victim to his infallible arrows. He would bring destruction of soldiers falling within the circumference of two miles from his chariot. In the meantime evening shadows began to fall. His horses were greatly tormented on account of the arrows that had pierced their bodies and were extremely tired on account of excessive workload. Hunger and thirst was oppressing them all the more. Arjuna asked Śrī Kṛṣṇa—“Please let loose the horses and pull out the arrows. Meanwhile I shall manage to check these *Kauravas* from advancing.” Saying so Arjuna jumped off the chariot and exercising great care took up the bow and firmly stood at one place. Knowing this to be the golden opportunity for

overpowering him the warriors on the opposite side all at once surrounded him on all sides and enveloped him with arrows and a variety of weapons but obstructing their force with his weapons enveloped all of them instead with his arrows. Meanwhile Śrī Kṛṣṇa informed Arjuna that the horses were oppressed with great thirst but there was no pool nearby. At this Arjuna breaking the earth through with his divine weapons created a beautiful pool of water as was suitable for the horses to drink at. Besides he raised the structure of a house with the help of his arrows over it. Noticing this miraculous valour of Arjuna, the *Siddhas* (the accomplished ones) bards and the soldiers were struck with great amazement and began to applaud him. The greatest wonder was that though Arjuna was fighting afoot, even the greatest of warriors failed to force him to retreat. Meanwhile Śrī Kṛṣṇa swiftly pulling out the arrows from the horses' bodies bathed them, rubbed them and made them drink water and eat grass and making them lie down on the ground again yoked them to the chariot. When Arjuna approached Jayadratha he was attacked by a group of eight warriors and Duryodhana in order to save his brother-in-law garrisoned him from all sides but encountering them all Arjuna kept on marching ahead. Nobody dared stop his forceful penetration. By the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa he, however, made Jayadratha the prey to his adamant arrow by the sunset and according to the directions of

Śrī Kṛṣṇa he however, cut off his head with such a skill that his head crossed the borders of Kurukṣetra and fell into the lap of his father. Thus with the help of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna fulfilled his pledge by killing Jayadratha before the sunset.

Arjuna was not only a matchless archer and a valiant fighter unchallenged in the world, but also was pre-eminently true to his words and a virtuous and righteous man who exercised control over his senses. During the time the *Pāṇḍavas* ruled over Indraprastha one day some bandits made off with the cows belonging to a *Brāhmaṇa*. The *Brāhmaṇa* came to them and cried out for their help. Arjuna heard the pitiable cry of the *Brāhmaṇa* and promised him to bring back his cows. But his arms were lying in the room where his elder brother, emperor Yudhiṣṭhira, was sitting in seclusion with Draupadī. It was previously agreed upon by the five brothers that while Draupadī was in seclusion with any of the five brothers if anyone of them ventured to enter the room, he would have to spend twelve years in the forest practising continence. Arjuna was in a great dilemma. If he did not protect the *Brāhmaṇa*'s cows, he would infringe the duties of a *Kṣatriya* and in case he entered the room for taking out the arms for their sake, he would violate the concord. At last Arjuna decided to violate the concord in order to save the cows of the *Brāhmaṇa*. He argued to himself. "It is my solemn duty to protect the *Brāhmaṇa*'s cows and to punish the wrong-doers, however severe be the

atonement for the violation of the concord or even if it entails the risk to my life, for the fulfilment of duties is more important than even to save my life.” Blessed be the devotedness to one’s duty.

Arjuna entered the room of Yudhiṣṭhira unnoticed, and took out the arms and having chased the bandits without any loss of time, brought back the *Brāhmaṇa*’s cows. After returning from there he asked for his elder brother’s permission to go to the forest for atonement. Yudhiṣṭhira explained to him—“There is no error if a younger brother happens to come in at a time when the elder one is sitting beside his wife. If there is any error at all it concerns me alone and I readily excuse it. Moreover, that you violated the concord and it was only for the sake of discharging your duty; therefore, you needn’t go to the forest.” Here was an opportunity for Arjuna to escape from the obligation of the atonement. Had there been any other man in Arjuna’s place, he would not have missed such an opportunity. Now-a-days it is a common practice with the people to resort to law to save themselves from the clutches of law itself but on no pretext would Arjuna escape punishment. In spite of Yudhiṣṭhira’s express consent he thought it proper to abide by the code of conduct for the sake of upholding the cause of truthfulness and having received necessary instructions for dwelling in forest, started from there. Blessed be the adherence to one’s vows and dedication

to the observance of code of conduct.”

One day while Arjuna was staying at Indrapurī and was acquiring the knowledge of the use of divine weapons and music, Indra sent Urvaśī, the fairest of the fairies to Arjuna to attend on him. That day Indra had marked Arjuna gazing with unwinking eyes at Urvaśī in the assembly. Urvaśī was already enamoured of the handsome personality and accomplishments of Arjuna. Asked by Indra she went to Arjuna after embellishing herself in the most sophisticated manners. Seeing Urvaśī thus approaching him at night all by herself casting away all sense of propriety, Arjuna stood still in amazement. Out of most modesty he shut his eyes and made obeisance to Urvaśī as if she were his mother. Urvaśī was stunned to see this. She did not expect Arjuna to behave that way. Frankly she gave vent to her lustful feelings. Now, Arjuna was immensely overweighted with the sense of shame. He closed both of his ears with his hands and said—“What say you, mother? Undoubtedly you are as good as the wife of my preceptor. In that assembly of gods I did look at you intently but I had no evil thoughts in my heart. I was arguing to myself that you must be the mother of Puru race. That is why I looked at you so intently. Revered lady, you must not take it otherwise. In my eyes you are the eldest of all the elderly persons and the progenitor of my ancestors. Just as Kuntī, Mādrī and Śacī, the wife of Indra, are mothers to me so also

being the progenitor of the Puru race, you are virtually my revered mother. I bow down at your revered feet to offer my salutations.” Now Urvaśī was highly enraged. She cursed him thus—“I came to you at the direction of Indra, driven as I was by lust but you have kicked at my loving heart so you will be obliged to live like a male dancer in the midst of women and you will be branded with the name ‘eunuch’ by the people. Arjuna cheerfully accepted the curse upon him but did not shun his duties. It was the work of none else than Arjuna to avoid an exceedingly beautiful lady like Urvaśī who had wilfully come to him all alone in seclusion. Blessed be such control of senses. When Indra came to know about it he called for Arjuna, patted him on his back and said—“My son, blessed is your mother to have you for her son. In self-control you have even surpassed the *Rṣis*. Don’t worry at all. The curse pronounced by Urvaśī will prove to be a boon for you. In the thirteenth year from now when you will have to remain incognito unidentified, this curse will help you hide your identity from others. At the end of that period manliness will be restored to you. It is truly said—“धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः” (Whoever protects *Dharma* stands protected by *Dharma*). When the period of remaining unidentified at Virāṭanagara, came to an end the *Pāṇḍavas* revealed their identity to king Virāṭa and in token of his gratefulness he expressed his desire to marry his daughter Uttarā Kumārī to

Arjuna. But Arjuna did not accept the offer. He said—“O king, I have lived long in the inner apartment of your palace and in isolation as well as in public, I have looked upon your daughter as my own. She too has confided in me as father. I have danced before her and know the art of music. So in spite of her love for me she has always looked upon me as her teacher. She is now grown up and I had to remain in her contact for a year. As such I accept her as my daughter-in-law so that you or anybody else should not grow suspicious about either of us. Only by doing so, will our relations rise above all suspicion. “Everyone was full of praise for the pious sentiments of Arjuna and Uttarā was married to Abhimanyu. Men like Arjuna alone, exercising self-control can keep themselves unstained and hatch no evil desire at heart even after living in close contact with a young lady. Grown up boys and teachers for girls are advised to take a lesson from this exemplary behaviour.

Aśwatthāmā, having murdered the sons of the *Pāṇḍavas*, Dhṛṣṭadyumna and others while they were sleeping, went to the bank of the Gaṅgā and sat there. Afterwards on hearing about the heinous crime committed by Aśwatthāmā, Bhīmasena and Arjuna went out in search of him in order to avenge on him. Seeing Bhīma and Arjuna approaching, Aśwatthāmā, much frightened and finding no means of escape, launched *Brahmāstra*. In no time such fire as breaks out at the times of chaos,

blazed forth and began to spread on all sides. In order to extinguish the terrible fire Arjuna also revealed *Brahmāstra*, for the evil effects of *Brahmāstra* could be done away with the launching of *Brahmāstra* alone. When the two missiles collided against each other a terrible noise was produced, thousands of meteors shot out and all people were struck with horror on witnessing the terrible mishap. *Devarṣi* Nārada and the great *Rṣi* Vyāsa arrived there simultaneously and tried to pacify both the warriors. As advised by the two great men, Arjuna at once retracted the missile. He had hurled it simply to calm down the missile of Aśwatthāmā. It was the peculiarity with the missile that it was very difficult to withdraw it all at once. Only a celibate could do so. Making due consideration of the arrival of the two great men Aśwatthāmā also tried his best to withdraw it but being unchaste he could not do so. At last as directed by Vyāsajī he directed the missile towards the womb of Uttarā and as a result a dead child was born to her but Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa restored it to life. Thus in the character of Arjuna we find a strange combination of the two qualities namely valour, knowledge of divine weapons and control over senses.

Arjuna's life was a divine one. The more we reflect on his character the more exemplary and instructive do we find it.



Kuntī Devī—An Ideal Lady

Kuntī Devī was an ideal lady. She was the mother of the high-souled *Pāṇdavas* and father's sister of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. She was Vasudeva's own sister and was given in adoption to king Kuntibhoja. Since her birth people called her Pṛthā but as she was brought up by king Kuntibhoja, she was popularly known as Kuntī. Since her childhood she was good-natured, virtuous, self-controlled and a devotee. One day a highly sublime *Brāhmaṇa* came as a guest to king Kuntibhoja. The task of attending on him was entrusted to maiden Kuntī. She had great devotion for the *Brāhmaṇas* and took great interest in serving the guests. Shaking off her sloth and ego she devoted herself heart and soul to the service of the revered *Brāhmaṇa*. She earned the pleasure of the revered *Brāhmaṇa* through serving him with a pure heart. The revered *Brāhmaṇa* however, behaved in a queer manner. Sometimes he would turn up at an untimely hour and sometimes he did not turn up at all for days together and sometimes he demanded a thing which was hard to find but Pṛthā would satisfy him by all means as if she had made preparations for the same beforehand. The *Brāhmaṇa* felt great satisfaction over her amiable nature, virtuous

conduct and restrained manners. The service rendered by her to the *Brāhmaṇa* during her childhood proved a benediction to her and it laid the foundation of self-control, virtuous conduct, self-sacrifice and a sense of service in her life. In her later life these qualities developed in her exceptionally.

The sentiment of selfless service had developed in Kuntī since her childhood. She had spent full one year in serving the high-souled *Brāhmaṇa* with great dedication and promptness. She had completed the observance of sacred duty of service. The *Brāhmaṇa* could not scan any fault with her service. As a result he was very happy with her. He said to her—"My daughter, I am much pleased at your dedicated service. Ask for any boon you desire." Kuntī gave a befitting reply to the revered *Brāhmaṇa*. This reply was quite befitting the *Būā* (father's sister) of Śrī kṛṣṇa and the would-be mother of the *Pāṇḍavas*. Kuntī said—"you and father both are happy with me and this much is enough for the fulfilment of all my desires. No more do I stand in need of the bestowal of boons." The devotion to service with a spirit of unselfishness was indeed an extraordinary combination in a minor girl. The girls of our country ought to take a lesson from the ideal of selfless service of Kuntī. Hospitality to guests has been the life-breath of our social life and the Indians would receive its training since their very childhood. The sincere and

Sāttvika service is one which is rendered cheerfully, without the feeling of burdensome uneasiness and with no self-interest. Generally these two feelings are absent in services rendered these days. The service rendered cheerfully and without selfish motive becomes the supreme means of one's spiritual well-being.

Hence when Kuntī did not ask for any boon from the *Brāhmaṇa*, the latter insisted her to accept from him the *Mantra* capable of invoking gods. He had the desire to give Kuntī something or the other before his departure. This time she could not spurn the offer thinking that *Brāhmaṇa* may take her denial as his insult. Then he initiated her into the *Mantras* occurring in the preliminary section of the *Atharva Veda* and said—"Whichever god you will invoke through these *Mantras* that shall become subservient to you." Saying these words the *Brāhmaṇa* disappeared then and there. The *Brāhmaṇa* was none else than Durvāsā the great sage who practised severe penance. Through the occult influence of these *Mantras* she was blessed with sons like Yudhiṣṭhira, by virtue of the grace of gods like Dharma and others.

Kuntī was married to king Pāṇḍu. He was a very righteous person. Once he unknowingly killed sage Kindama who was disguised as a deer. This incident aroused in his heart the feeling of great remorse and dispassion. Having renunciated everything he began to dwell in the forest. Kuntī was extremely devoted to her

husband. Having subdued her senses and giving up sensual enjoyment, she became ready to live in the forest with her husband. She faithfully observed continence till the end of her life and lived a life of self restraint. When her husband left for his celestial abode, she willed to follow her husband leaving her children to the care of Mādrī her younger co-wife. But Mādrī opposed it. She said—"I am still quite young hence I shall follow my husband. Instead you should take care of my children." Kuntī agreed to her proposal and till the end of her life paid greater care to her sons than her own. Our mothers and sisters should take lesson from Kuntī's life how one's co-wife and her children should be treated by one. During her husband's life time she treated Mādrī like her own sister and after she burnt herself alive at the pyre of her husband, she entertained the same feelings for her children as a pious lady should entertain. She had a great affection for Sahadeva and he too had a deep love for her.

Since the death of Kuntīdevī's husband her life became a tale of continuous troubles. But she was very thoughtful and was endowed with forbearance. So she did not at all mind the troubles and did not deviate from the path of righteousness till the end. She patiently endured the atrocities inflicted by Duryodhana. She had a very tender and compassionate heart. She did not at all mind her own trouble but she could not bear to see

others in trouble. After safely coming out of the house made of lac, she began to live in a city called Ekacakrā, during those days the people of the place lived under the stress of a great horror. A demon named Bakāsura lived in the suburb of that city. The inhabitants of the city had to supply a cart load of foodgrain and two she-buffaloes for that demon everyday. The demon devoured the man too who took these things to him. The inhabitants had to do this work by turns. One day it was the turn of that house for sending a man to that demon, in which *Pāṇḍavas* had taken shelter as beggars. There rose a great hue and cry in the *Brāhmaṇa's* family. When Kuntī came to know of this fact, her heart was filled with great pity. She reflected thus—It will be a matter of great shame for us if in spite of our presence the *Brāhmaṇa* has to undergo trouble. Besides he had provided us the shelter. We should repay his debt someway or the other. The failure to repay the debt of a benefactor on time, is verily a lapse from righteous conduct. Since we live in his house it is our duty to partake of their trouble. Reflecting that way Kuntī went to the *Brāhmaṇa's* house. She found *Brāhmaṇa* sitting with his wife and son. He said to his wife—“You belong to a noble family, are virtuous and mother of your children. I cannot send you to the demon in order to save my life.” Hearing the words of husband the *Brāhmaṇa's* wife said—“No, I myself shall go to him.

The supreme duty of a wife is to do good to her husband even at the cost of her life. It is a matter of blessedness for a woman to leave for the other-world prior to her husband. "It is just possible that demon may not kill me, considering as woman is not worth killing. Killing of the man is sure but a woman's killing is doubtful so send me to him." Hearing the pathetic conversation between father and mother the daughter said—"Well, according to custom both of you will abandon me one day or the other. Then why, don't you save yourselves by abandoning me this day. People crave for children so that they might save them from trouble." Hearing those words the parents began to weep. The daughter too could not help her tears. Seeing all of them weeping the *Brāhmaṇa*'s tiny son spurted out—"My father, my mother and sister, please don't weep." Then picking up a straw laughingly he said that he could kill the demon with its help. Then all burst into laughter. Kuntī had been seeing and hearing all this, she stepped forward and said—"Sire, you have but one son and one daughter. By the grace of God I have five sons. I shall send one of them to carry the demon's food to him, don't you worry. The revered *Brāhmaṇa* expressed reluctance to the proposal of Kuntīdevī. He said—"O revered one, your words behove you but I can't allow my guest to be killed for my sake." Then Kuntī explained to him that the son she would send to the demon was

very powerful, accomplished in *Mantras* and was puissant. One cannot cause any harm to him.” At this the *Brāhmaṇa* agreed. Then Kuntī deputed Bhīma for the job and sent him to the demon. Can any mother knowingly sacrifice in such a way her son who is the part and parcel of her life for other’s sake. Needless it is to say that this ideal sacrifice of Kuntī has left a desirable impression all over the world. Hence all must take a lesson from her life.

Kuntī’s devotion to truth was an ideal one. She did not resort to falsehood even while jesting, by mistake if some words escaped her mouth she tried her best to be true to them. Another example of such devotedness and truthfulness would not be available, however persistently though we might turn the pages of history. Having won Draupadī in *Swayamvara* when Arjuna and Bhīma approached their mother and said—“Mother, we have got this as alms today.” Without looking at what it was she said—“Let all the five brothers use it together.” When she came to know that they had brought a girl, she became much perplexed. She thought to herself that if she withdrew her words she would be committing a sin of falsehood and if she asked her sons to obey her words, the long established tradition would come to naught. The event of five brothers marrying one lady was unprecedented, under such circumstances Kuntīdevī could not decide what to do. She became perplexed. At

last she asked for the opinion of Yudhiṣṭhira who advised her to stick to the truth. Later on when king Drupada protested against it Vedavyāsajī related to them the story of Draupadī's previous birth and explained to them by virtue of the boon granted to her by Śaṅkarajī all the five brothers would marry the daughter of Drupada. Under the circumstances the daughter of Drupada was ceremoniously married to all the five brothers. Kuntīdevī's dedication to truthfulness gained victory. The words that spurted out of her mouth conformed to what was destined to happen. Such a coincidence is not impossible provided truth is strictly adhered to.

From beginning to the end Kuntī's life was remarkable for self-denial, austerities and detachedness. During the period of the *Pāṇḍavas*' banishment and even living incognito she lived separately at Hastināpura and from there she sent to her sons message of strictly adhering to the duties pertaining to the *Kṣatriyas* through her nephew Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Quoting the example of Vidulā and Sañjaya, she sent to them heart-touching words—"My sons, the occasion for which a *Kṣatrāṇī* gives birth to her sons has cropped up. Do not put to shame the milk that you suckled from my breast." Even during the period of *Mahābhārata* war she stayed there and after the end of the war when Yudhiṣṭhira, the pious one, was enthroned and she was blessed with the status of mother queen (*Rājamātā*) she took upon herself the

duty of serving her husband's brother and his wife who were bereaved of their sons and ridding herself of malice and arrogance, began to spend her time attending on them. Moreover, when they proceeded towards the forest with the consent of Yudhiṣṭhira, she silently followed them. In spite of all persuasions made by Yudhiṣṭhira and others she did not deviate from her firm determination. After a life time period of troubles and miseries when the days of happiness dawned on her, it was the work of a pious lady like Kuntī to deny herself the worldly enjoyments and to accept for herself at her own free will the life of renunciation, austerities and service. The example of making such sacrifice for the same brother of her husband and his wife from whom she got nothing but troubles, insult and atrocities for herself, her sons and their wives, is hard to find in the world. Our mothers and sisters should take lesson from the matchless spirit of sacrifice of Kuntīdevī.

While Kuntīdevī was proceeding towards the forest, Bhīmasena tried to bring home to her saying—"Mother, if this was to be done by you why did you make us indulge in such an orgy of bloodshed? Why did you bring us to the city after the death of our father who was a forest dweller?" What Kuntīdevī said in reply at the time is worth being borne in mind. She said—"Dear son, I inspired you to fight simply that you might not sit idly in a cowardly manner, might not lead despicable

life by giving up the ultimate goal befitting the *Kṣatriyas* and that you may not be deprived, for ever, of your just rights; I did not do so for the sake of my own happiness. I do not cherish the desire for enjoying kingly life. Now through practising austerities, I want to attain the realms attained by my husband. So attending on my husband's brother and his wife I mean to spend the rest of my life observing austerities. You should return home cheerfully and perseveringly looking after the comforts of your subjects, try to provide happiness to the members of your family." Thus consoling her sons Kuntīdevī sallied for the forest in the company of her husband's brother and his wife living with them in their service till the end of their life and finally gave up her mortal frame like *Yogīs* by entering into the forest-fire with them. Ideal ladies like Kuntīdevī are rarely to be found in the history of the world.



Devī Draupadī

Devī Draupadī was the daughter of Drupada, the king of Pāñcāla, but she was not born of a womb. She emanated as it were, from a sacrificial altar. She possessed unparalleled charm and grace. No contemporary woman upon the earth possessed such charm as she, such fragrance as is wafted by freshly blooming lotuses, exhaled from her body and spread about two miles around her. At the time of her birth there was an oracle—“This gem among the ladies has taken birth for the fulfilment of gods’ plan and extirpating the *Kṣatriyas* from the face of the earth. She will be the cause of a great terror to the *Kauravas*.” Dark complexioned as she was people called her Kṛṣṇā (having dark coloured skin). By virtue of the boon granted to her in her previous birth, She had five husbands in the present birth. In spite of the fact that she was won by Arjuna alone at the *Swayamvara*, all the five brothers wedded her according to the behest of Kuntī.

Draupadī was ardently devoted to the Lord and supremely faithful to her husbands. She had unflinching love for the revered feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa. She considered Him not only as a saviour, well-wisher and claimed

Him to be her supreme kinsman but also had profound faith in His omnipotence and omnipresence. In the assembly of the *Kauravas* when Duḥśāsana tried to strip her off her clothes in order to derobe her and none of the courtiers dared oppose the inhuman atrocity, she finding no way out to save herself piteously cried for Śrī Kṛṣṇa's help thus—

गोविन्द द्वारकावासिन् कृष्ण गोपीजनप्रिय॥
 कौरवैः परिभूतां मां किं न जानासि केशव।
 हे नाथ हे रमानाथ ब्रजनाथार्त्तिनाशन।
 कौरवार्णवमग्रां मामुद्धरस्व जनार्दन॥
 कृष्ण कृष्ण महायोगिन् विश्वात्मन् विश्वभावन।
 प्रपन्नां पाहि गोविन्द कुरुमध्येऽवसीदतीम्॥

(*Mahābhārata, Sabhā. 68. 41–43*)

“O Govind, who dwelleth in Dwārakā, O Kṛṣṇa, the beloved of the *Gopīs*, O Keśava, are you not aware of the fact that I am being humiliated by the *Kauravas*.

O universal Lord, the consort of Ramā,

O saviour of Vraja and destroyer of all suffering,

O Lord creator of the universe,

O Janārdana, save me from floundering in the ocean of the *Kauravas*' tyranny.

O Govinda, save me who have taken refuge in you and who has fallen into the clutches of the *Kauravas*.”

The Lord listens to the piteous outcry of a sincere heart without any delay. At that time Śrī Kṛṣṇa was staying at Dwārakā. From there He rushed upto her and

hiding Himself in the form of Dharma in her garments saved her modesty. By the grace of God the length of Draupadī's saree increased times without number. The more Duḥśāsana pulled at it, the longer it grew. In no time a heap of clothes was visible there. The mighty arms of the most powerful Duḥśāsana lost their vigour but the other end of the saree was not yet accessible. All who were present in the assembly witnessed this miraculous outcome of devotion to the Lord and feminine Chastity. At last Duḥśāsana defeatedly and shamefacedly sat down. The Lord who is ever well-disposed to His devotees saved the modesty of His devotee. Hail to such favourableness to the devotees.

While the Pāṇḍavas along with Draupadī were staying in the forest called *Kāmyaka*, one day it so happened that at the instance of Duryodhana the great Ṛṣi Durvāsā accompanied by a host of his disciples numbering ten thousand approached the *Pāṇḍavas*. On purpose did Duryodhana send him to them, when having finished their meals all of the *Pāṇḍavas* were relaxing themselves. For the purpose of entertaining the guests properly, king Yudhiṣṭhira had obtained through solicitation of sun-god, such a magic pot that even scanty food cooked in it became inexhaustible. But the condition was that this magic power could remain effective only so long as Draupadī would not finish her meals. Yudhiṣṭhira invited him to a dinner along

with the host of his disciples. Subsequently Durvāsājī accompanied by all went to the bank of the Gaṅgā for bathing and performing other daily rituals.

When Durvāsājī went about a host of ten thousand disciples followed him and it seemed as if a whole university escorted him. All of them had of course been invited by Dharmarāja to have their meals and the Ṛṣi had expressed his consent but nobody took notice of the fact that Draupadī had already finished her meal and so food could not be provided to them even through the effect of the pot provided by sun-god, Draupadī was greatly worried. She thought to herself that if the Ṛṣi returns unfed, he won't refrain from invoking a curse. He was known throughout the world for his wrathful nature. When Draupadī was unable to find a solution she remembered Lord Kṛṣṇa who relieves His devotees from all fears, from the core of her heart and in order to relieve her from the present crisis prayed Him thus—

कृष्ण कृष्ण महाबाहो देवकीनन्दनाव्यय ॥
 वासुदेव जगन्नाथ प्रणतार्तिविनाशन ।
 विश्वात्मन् विश्वजनक विश्वहर्तः प्रभोऽव्यय ॥
 प्रपन्नपाल गोपाल प्रजापाल परात्पर ।
 आकूतीनां च चित्तीनां प्रवर्तक नतास्मि ते ॥
 वरेण्य वरदानन्त अगतीनां गतिर्भव ।
 पुराणपुरुष प्राणमनोवृत्त्याद्यगोचर ॥
 सर्वाध्यक्ष पराध्यक्ष त्वामहं शरणं गता ।
 पाहि मां कृपया देव शरणागतवत्सल ॥

नीलोत्पलदलश्याम पद्मगर्भारुणेक्षण ।
 पीताम्बरपरीधान लसत्कौस्तुभभूषण ॥
 त्वमादिरन्तो भूतानां त्वमेव च परायणम् ।
 परात्परतरं ज्योतिर्विश्वात्मा सर्वतोमुखः ॥
 त्वामेवाहुः परं बीजं निधानं सर्वसम्पदाम् ।
 त्वया नाथेन देवेश सर्वापद्भ्यो भयं न हि ॥
 दुःशासनादहं पूर्वं सभायां मोचिता यथा ।
 तथैव संकटादस्मान्मामुद्धर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥

(*Mahābhārata, Vana. 263.8–16*)

“O Kṛṣṇa, O large armed Srī Kṛṣṇa, O son of Devakī, O imperishable Lord, O remover of troubles of the grief-stricken people who lie prostrate at your revered feet, O Lord of the universe, You alone are the Supreme Soul pervading the entire universe. The creation and dissolution of the universe is but a playful act of your hand. O God, you are indestructible. O Gopāla, the protector of those taking refuge in you. You are the saviour of the entire created beings—the most transcendental, Supreme Being. You are the motive force behind all mental propensities and the blissful state of the spirit. I make obeisance to Thee. O Infinite, worthy of adoration of all and bestower of boons, hasten to save those helpless devotees who are unable to find anyone but You to help them. O Eternal Being, the propensities of mind and vital powers miserably fail to make access to You. O Supreme Being, the passive witness of all, I surrender myself to you.

O Lord! You who are favourably disposed to those taking refuge in you, be kind to save me from harm. O dark complexioned Lord, having bodily complexion like that of blue lotuses and eyes slightly reddish like the core of lotuses. O Kṛṣṇa adorned with gem called Kaustubha and apparelled in yellow garment, you are the most transcendental, effulgent, all pervading and the Over-soul. Men endowed with knowledge call You alone the eternal seed of the entire creation and the perennial source of all the divine attributes. So long as you are there to protect me there can be no cause of fear even if all the calamities befall me. Just as you saved me on a previous occasion in the assembly from the clutches of Duḥśāsana so also be kind enough now to help us out of the present predicament.”

The innerself of everyone verily stands revealed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He arrived there without any loss of time. It seemed as if Draupadī was vivified at the sight of Him—as if a drowning man had caught at a straw. Draupadī summarily related to Him the whole matter. Displaying His impatience Śrī Kṛṣṇa said—“We shall talk about other matters afterwards. First let me have something to eat. I am extremely hungry. You can hardly imagine what a long distance I had to cover in arriving here and how desperately exhausted I am.” Draupadī was mortified with shame. She stammered out—“My Lord, I have just finished my meal. Little is

left in that cooking pot now.” “Let me atleast have a glance at the cooking pot” said Śrī kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇā (Draupadī) brought out the pot. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa took up the pot and examined it, he found a piece of leafy vegetable sticking at its neck. Putting the same into His mouth He said—“Let the Lord of the entire universe and the enjoyer of offerings made at the sacrificial altar be appeased with this piece of leafy vegetable. Subsequently he said to Sahadeva—“Brother, now go to fetch the respectable sages to have their dinner. When Sahadeva reached the bank of the river Gaṅgā he found none of them there. What had exactly happened was that while Śrī Kṛṣṇa was putting the leafy vegetable into His mouth and pronouncing His resolve, the great sages standing in the water were sanctifying themselves. All of a sudden such a feeling arose in their mind that their bellies were full upto the neck with victual. They looked at each other as if to ask—“What can we possibly eat there at the cottage of the *Pāṇḍavas*? Durvāsā saw wisdom in escaping away from there unnoticed for he knew it well that the *Pāṇḍavas* were devoted to God and ever since the untoward happenings that took place at the house of Ambarīṣa he had begun to entertain great fright for the Lord’s devotees. Eventually all of them fled away from there. Sahadeva received the information of their escapade from the ascetics who dwelt there and after

returning from there he narrated the matter to Dharmarāja. Thus through Draupadī's devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, an imminent danger to the *Pāṇḍavas* was averted. Through His arrival Śrī Kṛṣṇa saved them from the wrath of Durvāsā and thus he displayed His affectionateness to those who make self surrender to Him.

Once Śrī Kṛṣṇa along with Satyabhāmā, the revered lady, paid a visit to the *Pāṇḍavas* in the forest. During her conversation with Draupadī Satyabhāmā said to her—"Sister, I dare ask you a question. I find that your gallant and mighty husbands are always reconciled to you. What is the reason behind it? Are you in the know of some magic formula or medicine or have you won over their hearts through *Japa*, penance, fasting, your learning, through offering oblations to the fire? Could you suggest some device to me as well through which I can win over the heart of Śyāmasundara? Draupadī, the revered lady, said—"Sister, I wonder why in spite of being the chief queen and beloved wife of Śyāmasundara, you speak like that. The ladies who are pious and exclusively devoted to their husbands refrain from such magic formulae in the same way as one keeps away from snakes and scorpions. Can one's husband be ever subjugated through magic formulae? Only the ignorant and wretch ladies resort to such methods in order to entice their husbands. By doing so they not only harm themselves but also harm their

husbands. One should always keep oneself aloof from such women.”

Subsequently she explained to her how she conducted herself in order to seek the pleasure of her husbands. Giving up the sense of self-esteem, lust and anger I with due care render service to all the *Pāṇḍavas* and the womenfolk of their family. I guard myself against spite and keeping my mind under control I surrender myself to the will of my husbands only with a view to serve them. I refrain from using bitter words. I do not stand in an uncivil manner. I do not cast a glance at evil things nor do I ever sit at an undesirable place, avoid the least nearness to those having evil character. But for the *Pāṇḍavas* I cherish for none else—be he a celestial being, a man, a demigod, young, affluent or handsome. I take food only after feeding my husbands, take bath only after they have taken theirs and sit down only after they take their seats. Whenever my husbands return home I stand up to show my respect and offer them seat and water. I scour and clean well all the utensils, prepare sweet dishes, offer meals on time and remain active all the time. I pay heed to the preservation of grains in the house and keep my house clean by sweeping and dusting it. I do not scorn at anyone during conversation with him and avoid the least contact with women of undesirable character and

shaking off sloth ever try to conduct myself in a way pleasing to my husbands. I avoid frequently standing at the gate nor do I stay longer at an open place or a place where rubbish is heaped. I always practise truthfulness in speech and devote myself to the service of my husbands. I don't like at all to live all alone without my husband. When my husband stays away from home on account of some domestic piece of work I stop the use of flowers and sandal-paste and spend my time in observing religious rites and keeping fast. I abstain from using such things as are not eaten, drunk or used by my husbands. I totally observe the injunctions of the scriptures prescribed for the ladies. I always try to bedeck myself with the clothes and cosmetics that are available and take precaution only to do that which is agreeable to my husbands.

I observe each and every household duty instructed to me by my revered mother-in-law. I virtually observe with due care day and night all the duties prescribed for me relating to the giving away of charities, offering worship and oblations to the manes, preparing of sweet dishes on festive occasions and the extending of warm welcome to the respectable persons etc. At all times I adhere to modest behaviour and regulated life. In my opinion the perpetual duty of women is only to remain under the control of their husbands for they are verily their deities. I never cherish a life better than those of

my husbands, never eat better food, never put on better clothes and ornaments than those worn by my husbands, never enter into conflict with my revered mother-in-law and ever exercise self-control. I, as a rule, get up earlier than my husbands and remain dedicated to the service of my elders. I regularly serve my mother-in-law by providing her food, water and clothes. In respect of garments, ornaments and food etc., I never aspire for anything special and different from my mother-in-law. Formerly king Yudhiṣṭhira had as many maid servants as ten thousand and I literally knew their names, features and clothes etc., and I also took due notice of what they did and what they did not. At the time when staying at Indraprastha king Yudhiṣṭhira carried on his administrative work, one lakh horses and equal number of elephants rode behind him. The work of counting them and the managing of their affairs was conducted by none else but me and it was I who had to pay heed to their requirements. Again it was I who looked after the work of all the servants including the milkmen and shepherds employed in the inner apartment.

I unassisted by anyone else would maintain the accounts of the king's income, expenditure and savings. Shifting the entire household duties on my shoulders, the *Pāṇḍavas* dedicated themselves to the offering of worship and greeting those who visited the house or departed from it. And I having given up all comforts

looked after them. I alone knew about the inexhaustible treasure that belonged to them. Undergoing the pain of hunger and thirst I dedicated myself day and night to the service of the *Pāṇḍavas*. Those days, days and nights had lost their distinction for me. I would be the first to rise and the last to go to bed. O Satyabhāmā, this is the method I know of, for seeking conciliation with one's husband. We should take a lesson from the life of Draupadī as to how an ideal house-wife should conduct herself.

Wonderful latending of effulgence befitting character of Devī Draupadī. She was very intelligent and endowed with learning. Extraordinary was her sense of selfless sacrifice. Her supreme dedication to her husbands was acknowledged by one and all. Catching hold of her hair when wicked Duḥśāsana dragged her to the assembly hall, she tried to intimidate him by saying that he would become the subject of her husband's wrath, rebuked the courtiers and admonished the respectable elderly persons like Droṇa, Bhīṣma and Vidura for remaining passive onlookers. She incited them and appealed to them in the name of justice and asked them in the name of *Dharma* if king Yudhiṣṭhira had any right to put her at stake after he had lost his own self at the stake. All the courtiers were rendered speechless. None dared answer Draupadī's question. At last rose Vikarna, the brother of Duryodhana, from his

seat and made an appeal to everyone to answer Draupadī's question and entreated them to break silence. He expressed his own view- point saying that firstly, Draupadī was verily the wife of all the five brothers, hence Yudhiṣṭhira had not the sole right to put Draupadī at stake. Secondly, he put Draupadī at stake after he had lost his own self at the stake and therefore, it should be regarded as an improper action done by him. On hearing the view-point of Vikarṇa, Vidura seconded it and some other courtiers praised him. But Karṇa rebuked him and made him sit down. In spite of being humiliated and dragged in such a way to the assembly hall packed to the capacity Draupadī did gain a moral victory. Her wit was predominant. Nobody dared oppose her views. At last at the suggestion of Vidura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra scolded Duryodhana and in order to please her inspired Draupadī to ask for a boon. Draupadī merely expressed the desire that her five husbands should be freed from slavery. Dhṛtarāṣṭra lovingly insisted her to ask for something more. Whatever Draupadī said in reply at that time was entirely befitting a woman like Draupadī alone. What she said clearly shows her greedlessness and love of duty (*Dharma*). She said, Sire, it is not proper to entertain much greed. Besides, I don't crave at all for anything else. My husbands themselves are capable enough. Now as they stand free from servility they will

be in a position to manage everything themselves. Thus through her wit and chastity she could be able to secure freedom for her husbands from servility.

Draupadī could never quite dismiss from her mind the fact that she was dragged to the assembly hall crowded with people by wicked Duḥśāsana by her same long and black hair which had of late been drenched with holy water sanctified through the recitation of *Mantras*. The fire of that unprecedented humiliation kept burning at her heart all the time. That was why whenever the proposal for making peace with the *Kauravas* came to her knowledge, she did nothing but oppose it and ever reminding them of the humiliation meted out to her by the *Kauravas* inspired her husbands to fight. At last when it was finally decided ultimately to make an effort to bring the *Kauravas* round and consequently when Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa was ready to proceed towards Hastināpura with peace proposal from the side of the *Pāṇḍavas* even at that moment she could not dismiss from her mind the incident and taking her long hair into her hand she said to Śrī Kṛṣṇa—“O Śrī Kṛṣṇa, it is good that you are going there for a peace accord. But do not fail to keep in view my hair.” She went on to say—“It matters little if the *Pāṇḍavas* do not cherish the desire to fight; my old father accompanied by his gallant sons shall combat with the *Kauravas* and my five sons including Abhimanyu shall wage war

against them.”

In the Kāmyaka forest when Jayadratha was trying to take Draupadī away by force, she pushed him so hard that he fell down on the ground like a cut down tree. But instantly he stood erect and forcibly dragging her into the chariot started from there. Later on, when Bhīma and Arjuna seized and brought him home and thrashed him soundly she, out of mercy, made him set at liberty. Thus we see that Draupadī not only became cross but also possessed a sense of forgiveness. The sublimity of her chaste life was unique. Whoever tried to molest or seduce her was deprived of his life. Duryodhana, Duṣṣāsana, Karṇa, Jayadratha, Kīcaka and others had to meet such a fate. Who should not be doomed by the heart-rending shrieks of a chaste woman undergoing tortures? The root cause of the extermination of the *Kauravas* in the battle of *Mahābhārata* was undoubtedly the humiliation of Draupadī who was faithfully devoted to her husbands.



Gāndhārī—Paragon of Chastity

Gāndhārī occupies a high place among the chaste ladies of the world. She was the daughter of Subala, the king of Gāndhāra and sister of Śakuni. When she was yet a virgin she obtained through inordinate adoration of Lord Śaṅkara the boon of having one hundred sons. Ever since she came to know that she was going to be married to Dhṛtarāṣṭra who was blind she bandaged both of her eyes. She thought to herself that since her husband was not blessed with eyesight she could not arrogate to herself the right of enjoying the sights of the world. From that day till the very end of her life she stuck to her firm resolve. Such an example of denying oneself sense enjoyments for the sake of husband can hardly be found in the history of the world. Such a self-denial and dispassion of her was marvellous and something rare for the world. She was always submissive to her husband. Soon after coming to her father-in-law's house through her character and virtues she cast a spell on her husband and all the members of his family. Blessed be one's love for one's husband.

Gāndhārī, the revered lady, was as intrepid and

justice-loving as she was exclusively devoted to her husband. She always stood for truth, ethical values and *Dharma* and would never side with injustice. She entertained in her heart much grief for the ill-treatment accorded to Draupadī by her own sons in the crowded assembly hall. She was not happy with her sons over the matter. She became much grieved when her husband, king Dhṛtarāṣṭra induced by his sons summoned the *Pāṇḍavas* for the second time to play the game of dice protesting against gambling she said to her revered husband—My Lord, no sooner did Duryodhana see the light of the day than he started crying and howling like a jackal that was why profoundly learned Vidurajī had instantaneously suggested to give up such a son. Whenever I am reminded of that prediction I assume he shall prove himself to be the cause of the extirpation of the lineage of the *Kurus*. Therefore, my most respected husband, do not hurl others into misfortunes on account of your own fault. Do not say ditto to what these impudent stupid people say. Do not make yourself the cause of the utter destruction of this lineage of ours. Do not pull down a bridge which is intact. The fire that lies extinguished shall blaze up again. The *Pāṇḍavas* are calm and are free from malice and animosity. It won't be proper to arouse their anger at this moment. Aware though you are of all these things, I take an opportunity to remind you. An ill-

witted person remains unaffected by the injunctions of the scriptures. It is improper that in spite of your old age you behave like a child. At present you must not disown the *Pāṇḍavas* who are sons to you. Take care that being aggrieved they may not seek separation from you. It is but proper to abandon Duryodhana who is a slur upon the family. This is the evil consequence of disregarding due to infatuation the advice given at that time by Vidurajī. Keep your reasoning power alive through unperturbedness, righteousness and by acting upon the wholesome advice of your ministers. Abstain from the negligence of duty. Acting without forethoughts will prove to be of great trouble to you. Kingly prosperity possessed by a wretch person causes his doom. These words of Gāndhārī abundantly reflect her righteousness, moral values and impartiality. She would caution Duryodhana against his evil doings and rebuke him for his overbearance and draw before him horrible pictures of terrible future consequences of his immoral activities. But his doom was looming large over his head which would not let him heed these salutary advices aiming at his own well-being.

When Lord Kṛṣṇa himself arrived at Hastināpura as the envoy of *Pāṇḍavas* and he too failed in His attempt to persuade Duryodhana, Dhṛtarāṣṭra called Gāndhārī to his presence and said to her—“Now it is time for you to bring your son round. He pays heed

to none of us.” Hearing these words Gāndhārī said—“O King, you are overwhelmed by infatuation for your son. So (in this regard) you are to be held mainly responsible for the fault. Knowing the fact that Duryodhana is a great sinner, you have hitherto been guided by his wits. Duryodhana is fully enmeshed by lust, anger and greed. You will not be able to even by the use of force, keep himself away from this path. Without considering the pros and cons you handed over the reigns of administration of the state in the hands of your son who is villaineous, ignorant, ill-companioned and greedy and now you are experiencing its evil consequences. You have constantly been ignoring the rift that is cropping up in your own family. By such an act of yours, you are making yourself ridiculous in the eyes of the *Pāṇḍavas*. Will any wise man ever resort to punishment to his own kith and kin in case a catastrophe could be averted through persuasion and allurements?” How frank, unbiased, beneficent, moral, ethical and sincere this assertion of Gāndhārī was!

After that she called for her son and started exhorting him. She spoke thus—“Dear son, listen to what I say. Act upon the advice given to you by your father, Bhīṣmajī, Droṇācārya, Kṛpācārya and Vidurajī. If you settle your dispute with the *Pāṇḍavas*, take it for granted, that you will hereby render a great service to the grand father Bhīṣma, your father, me and all your

well-wishers such as Droṇācārya and others as well. The attaining of kingship, safeguarding it and the enjoying of kingly glory—all are beyond human control. Only the man who has control over his senses can defend his kingdom. Lust and greed undoubtedly deprive one of one's wealth. The entire world can be conquered through the conquest of these two enemies. Just as an uncontrollable horse causes the death of his unwise charioteer on the way, so also the unsubdued senses are cause enough for bringing about the doom of a human being. Thus prosperity stays longer with one who exercises control over his senses and who undertakes all of his activities after fore-thought. Dear son, whatever advice has been given to you by grand father Bhīṣma and your preceptor Droṇācārya is quite sound. In fact Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna cannot be overcome by anybody. So you are advised to take refuge in Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His pleasure will ensure the well-being of both sides. Dear child, battling does not ensure one's well-being since it does not secure *Dharma* or material prosperity; it can't provide us happiness. If you as well as ministers want to enjoy the happiness of kingship you must give the *Pāṇḍavas* their due share. The act of banishing the *Pāṇḍavas* for thirteen years is another big crime done to them. Now alleviate the crime by making peace with them. O dear one, in this world none can become wealthy through

greed. So give up your greed and settle the matter with the *Pāṇḍavas*. How wholesome and heart-touching exhortation it was! It reveals the fact that Gāndhārī was endowed with learning and she also knew the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.

These noble teachings of Gāndhārī had little effect on wicked Duryodhana. He did not give up his obstinacy. The result was that preparations for war began on both sides and killing and fighting took place in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra continuously for eighteen days. During the period of war Duryodhana would pray her everyday saying—"Mother, I am going to have a terse fight with my enemies. Be good enough to bless me so that I may become victorious. Gāndhārī possessed the sublimity of the lady who looks upon her husband as her deity and if she at all blessed her son her words would not have become futile. But how could she dare bless him? She knew well that Duryodhana was an oppressor and kingly glory can never stay with a tyrant. That was why everytime he approached her she would repeat these words—My son, where there is *Dharma* there is victory. If you desire to become victorious do resort to *Dharma* and refrain from what is unrighteous." She never nursed any partiality for Duryodhana. But when the news came to her ears that all of her hundred sons were killed, her overwhelming grief aroused her wrath and she intended to invoke

curse on the *Pāṇḍavas*. Lord Vedavyāsa could verily know what was at other's heart. When Vedavyāsa came to know about her intention he approached her and offered her consolation and restrained her from her evil desire. The *Pāṇḍavas* too were present there at the time. Sensing the disgust at her heart Yudhiṣṭhira approached her and reproaching his own self the moment he tried to fall at her feet, Gāndhārī's wrathful glance penetrated through the bandage and fell on the nails of king Yudhiṣṭhira. It caused at once his lovely reddish nails turn black. Noticing this his brothers too began to hide themselves here and there out of fright. Noticing them in such a hesitant mood, Gāndhārī's temper cooled down and she consoled the *Pāṇḍavas* like a mother. The above mentioned incident reveals to us the matchless sublimity Gāndhārī was endowed with by virtue of her single-minded devotion to her husband. Finally Śrī Kṛṣṇa had to become the victim of her wrath. To put it in other words, it was none else but indweller Śrī Kṛṣṇa who saved the *Pāṇḍavas* from her wrath by changing her mind and making Himself the object of her fury and curse. When revered Gāndhārī went to Kurukṣetra and looked at the heart rending scenes of the battlefield she could not help control her sorrow. She became wrathful and spoke to Śrī Kṛṣṇa thus—"O Kṛṣṇa, the *Pāṇḍavas* and the Kauravas have surely been doomed on account of their

hostility. But how it is that in spite of your capabilities you did not care for the interest of your kith and kin. You had a number of servants and a large army as well. You could, if you would prevail on both of them and could bring them round through your skill of speech but knowingly you did not mind the destruction of the *Kauravas*. So you must now bear the consequence of your neglect. On the score of merits that I have earned through the service of my husband, I hereby curse you that as you wilfully neglected the *Pāṇḍavas* and the *Kauravas* fighting with one another so also you shall be responsible for the killing of your own kith and kin and you yourself shall be killed with none nearby to protect you. Just as these ladies belonging to the race of Bharata are piteously lamenting so also shall the ladies of your family weep and wail the death of their friends and relatives.”

Hearing these harsh words of Gāndhārī large-hearted Śrī Kṛṣṇa smiled and said—“I was aware of the fact that things would take such a course. By invoking the curse you have simply foretold what was already destined to happen. Undoubtedly the extermination of *Vṛṣṇi* race will take place on account of divine wrath. Its extermination will be caused by none else but me. Far less to speak of men even the gods and the demons are not capable of bringing about its extermination. So the men belonging to the *Yadu*-race

shall cause their own destruction through mutual conflicts.

After the coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira the revered Gāndhārī stayed with him for some time but subsequently went to the forest in order to live with her husband and having lived there the life of an ascetic, and like ascetics burnt herself alive along with her husband in the forest-fire and attained the realms of Kubera along with her husband. Thus Gāndhārī who was exclusively devoted to her husband having served her husband in the world, got an opportunity to live in close proximity to and served her husband which is the ultimate object of a lady exclusively devoted to her husband. Every lady exclusively devoted to her husband should reflect on the character of Gāndhārī and should take lesson from it.



Vidurajī—A Great Soul

Vidurajī, a great soul, was the very incarnation of *Dharma*. Due to the curse of *Rṣi Māṇḍavya* he had to take birth as a *Śūdra* (in a low caste family). He was born of the maid servant of king *Vicitravīrya*. Thus he could be reckoned in one way as the real brother of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* and *Pāṇḍu*. He was very intelligent, virtuous, versed in moral and religious duties and was a scholar and devotee. On account of these qualities he commanded a great respect among people. He was very frank and fearless and offered good advice to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* and others. As it was, he was the minister of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. Soon after his birth *Duryodhana* had started braying. There were many ill omens predicting impending catastrophes. Noting all these things he as well as some other Brahmins said to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*—"This son of yours shall be the cause of the ruination of your own family. Hence it would be proper to abandon him. If he remains alive you will have to suffer. The scriptures have ordained that for the sake of a family, a person, for the sake of a village, a family, for the sake of the country, a village and for the sake of one's soul the entire earth should be abandoned." But out of infatuation for his son he did not act upon the advice of *Vidurajī*. As a consequence he had to suffer

throughout his life on account of Duryodhana and had to see the ruination of his own race during his very life. One who is not mindful of salutary advice of great souls has to suffer misery.

When Duryodhana began to torment the *Pāṇḍavas*, naturally Vidura's sympathies went in favour of the *Pāṇḍavas*; firstly because they were fatherless and secondly because they were righteous persons. Directly and indirectly he helped and offered them protection. A pious soul has natural sympathies for the righteous people and Vidura was righteousness incarnate. He knew that in spite of all the calamities the *Pāṇḍavas* will come out victorious in the end (wherever is righteousness, there is victory). He also knew that the *Pāṇḍavas* were blessed with a long life and as such they could not be killed by anyone. So when in a crafty move, Duryodhana made Bhīmasena take poisonous food and hurled him into the water of Gaṅgā, and on not returning of Bhīmasena, his mother Kuntī not only became worried but anticipated an untoward happening through Duryodhana. Vidurajī came to Kuntī and advised her thus—"It would be proper to keep silence at present, suspecting Duryodhana in this matter may entail danger. He will rather get more irritated by this and it may invite troubles to your other sons also. Bhīmasena cannot die. He will come back soon. Kuntī accepted his prudent advice. His words proved true, for after a few days Bhīma did return hale and hearty.

It was Vidurajī who had told the *Pāṇḍavas* the device of escaping unharmed from the house made of lac. Besides being versed in ethics he was a linguist too. When the *Pāṇḍavas* were going to Varanāvat, he informed them of the impending danger by sending to Yudhiṣṭhira a note written in a dialect known to *Malecchais* and also hinted to them how they could escape. Besides this he had deputed beforehand a man to dig a tunnel for escaping from the house made of lac and the man built an underground passage leading to the forest. Setting fire to the house made of lac the *Pāṇḍavas* along with their mother Kuntī came out unharmed through that passage. In order to take them across the Gaṅgā Vidurajī had already deputed a sailor with a boat, with the help of that boat they went across the river Gaṅgā. Vidurajī saved the lives of *Pāṇḍavas* through his wits and tactful device and also took precaution to keep it a secret from Duryodhana and others. Duryodhana thought that the *Pāṇḍavas* with their mother Kuntī must have been reduced to ashes. Physical power and the power of weapons alone do not serve our purpose in every situation. Prudence is also necessary for self protection. Vidura, a great soul, had not only a profound knowledge of *Dharma* and the scriptures but was the treasure-house of ethics also.

Just as Vidura had sympathy and love for the *Pāṇḍavas*, so also he had affection and tender feelings for his elder brother Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons. He always looked after

their interest and would offer them good counsel 'हितं मनोहारि च दुर्लभं वचः' rare are such words as are salutary and as well as pleasant—according to this maxim, in spite of being veracious and wholesome whatever Vidurajī said seemed to be bitter to Duryodhana and others. Duryodhana and his associates were always dissatisfied with him. But without caring a fig for their displeasure he always solicited their welfare and made unwearied effort to divert Duryodhana from evil ways. Dhṛtarāṣṭra although dominated as he was by his evil-minded son, could not always act upon Vidura's advice and consequently had to suffer, still he trusted him much. He considered him as intelligent, far-sighted and his best well-wisher and generally he would not be undertaking any work without consulting him. In matters concerning the *Pāṇḍavas* especially he did not fail to consult him for he knew that in regard to the *Pāṇḍavas* his opinion will be unbiased.

When evil minded Duryodhana, instigated by his maternal uncle, Śakuni, approached his father Dhṛtarāṣṭra with the proposal for gambling with the *Pāṇḍavas*, he called Vidurajī as usual for taking his advice in the matter. When his father did not accede to his request he tried to intimidate him on the pretext of giving up his life but he firmly told him that without seeking the advice of Vidurajī he could not allow him to gamble. Hearing of the sinful proposal of Duryodhana, Vidurajī felt that *Kaliyuga* was fast approaching. He bluntly opposed the proposal and explained to his elder

brother thus—"By gambling the feeling of malice and antagonism will grow between your sons and your nephews and neither of the two will be benefited. So it will not be proper to arrange for gambling. Their welfare lies in not having a gambling. Admiring Vidurajī and also his sound opinion Dhṛtarāṣṭra tried his best to induce Duryodhana but he was not prepared to yield at all. He was bent upon slighting the *Pāṇḍavas* by defeating them in gambling. He was unable to bear their illimitable prosperity. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra felt that Duryodhana was not going to yield any way he consented to his proposal and sent none else than Vidurajī to call for the *Pāṇḍavas* from Indraprastha. Though Vidurajī took ill of it, he however did not deem it proper to disobey his elder brother.

On approaching the *Pāṇḍavas* Vidurajī told them the whole story. Knowing that gambling was undesirable, Yudhiṣṭhira, in obedience to his father Dhṛtarāṣṭra, accepted the proposal of Duryodhana. Even while the gambling was on enumerating the evils of gambling Vidurajī said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra—"Be cautious even now. Avoid saying ditto to whatever Duryodhana says and save your race from destruction. Do not make the *Pāṇḍavas* turn hostile by being malicious to them." When the *Pāṇḍavas* had gone to the forest Dhṛtarāṣṭra became anxious and felt a burning sensation in his heart. He called in Vidura and poured out to him the feelings at his heart and desired to know from him as to

how he should conduct himself to ensure the contentment of his subjects and the *Pāṇḍavas* may not get angry thus cause no harm to us. At this Vidurajī explained to him thus—“O king, riches, *Dharma* and sensual enjoyments—all these goals of life are achieved through *Dharma* alone. *Dharma* is the foundation of kingdoms, so establishing yourself in *Dharma* you should safeguard the *Pāṇḍavas* as well as your sons. Ill-advised by Śakuni, your sons have brought *Dharma* to ridicule in the assembly packed to the capacity. It is quite immoral as they have perfidiously defeated the truthful Yudhiṣṭhira in gambling and usurped his all. In my opinion it can be atoned in one way only through which your son can get deliverance from sin and censure and gain prestige. The way is that whatever has been usurped from the *Pāṇḍavas* should be restored to them forthwith. An emperor ought to be contented with his own ends, he must not aspire for usurping others’ rights’ The method I have advised you to follow will remove the blemish on you, discordance among brothers will cease to grow and there will not be violation of *Dharma* (duties). If your sons have the least merit to their credit, this work must be finished the sooner it is possible. If out of fondness you shirk from doing so, the whole of the *Kuru-race* will be doomed. If your son Duryodhana readily agrees to it then it is well and good otherwise putting malevolent Duryodhana who is a blot on the fair name of the family, into prison, enthrone Yudhiṣṭhira in his place for the good of your

family and the people. Yudhiṣṭhira has neither attachment nor spite for anyone, so he should rule in righteous manner. Duḥśāsana should ask for forgiveness from Bhīmasena and Draupadī before the whole assembly. Needless it is to say more, you will attain blessedness by doing so.”

This counsel of Vidurajī was sound, wholesome and was full of righteousness and intrepidity. But just as a man on the verge of death finds it irksome to take medicines so also Dhṛtarāṣṭra did not approve of the counsel of Vidurajī. He got irritated with him and said—“Vidura, no more I need your services. You may stay here or go away at your will. Time and again I here found you showing your partiality for the *Pāṇḍavas*. How can I abandon my sons for their sake?” Vidurajī now felt that the destruction of the Kuru race was inevitable, so without any demur he left the place and sitting in a chariot went to the *Pāṇḍavas* in the *Kāmyaka* forest. On reaching there he told the *Pāṇḍavas* the reason for leaving Hastināpura and during course of talks he told them something very significant. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra came to know that Vidurajī had gone to the *Pāṇḍavas* he felt repentant. He thought to himself that benefited by the assistance and the sound advice of Vidurajī the *Pāṇḍavas* would grow more powerful, so he lost no time in sending for Vidurajī through Sañjaya. Vidurajī was completely free from attachment and malice. He was not the least displeased with Dhṛtarāṣṭra just as

he had left Hastināpura by the order of his elder brother so also he returned to him after receiving his orders to that effect. On reaching there he said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra—In my eyes your sons and the *Pāṇḍavas* are alike but finding the *Pāṇḍavas* helpless, sympathy and desire for helping them arises in my heart as a matter of course. I bear no malice against your sons,” and such was indeed the state of affairs. Dhṛtarāṣṭra also expressed his regret for his indecent behaviour. Now staying with Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vidurajī began to serve him as usual.

Once Dhṛtarāṣṭra had to spend sleepless nights, then he sent for Vidurajī in the night and asked him how he could enjoy the peace of mind. On that occasion Vidurajī exhorted Dhṛtarāṣṭra regarding *Dharma* and moral duties and his beautiful exhortations are included in eight chapters numbering 33 to 40 of the *Udyogaparva*. This exhortation has its own value, is worth being studied and pondered over.*

Dhṛtarāṣṭra was not satiated by the exhortations of Vidurajī, He wanted to hear more of it from his mouth. He (Vidurajī) said—“O king, whatever I had to tell you has already been told. Now Sanatsujāta, the son of Brahmājī, who is the eternal *Rṣi* will initiate you in the essence of all true knowledge. It is not my privilege to do so for I was born of the womb of a *Śūdra* (a woman of low caste). Having said so he

* It has been published by us without any abridgement on pages 486 to 509 of the first book of abridged *Mahābhārata*.

presently recalled to his memory Sanatsujāta who without any delay presented himself there. While answering to the queries made by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sanatsujāta described* at length the aspect of God and the method of Divine vision. Thus Vidurajī not only instructed Dhṛtarāṣṭra on the subjects of *Dharma* and moral duties but also by making the supreme *Ṛṣi* Sanatsujāta exhort him on the subject of what is called the essence of all true knowledge, cleared the path of his redemption. Whatever efforts were made by Vidurajī for Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons all were directed towards their well-being. The very life of great souls is dedicated to the welfare of others. Though Vidurajī himself possessed the essence of all true knowledge, having been born a *Śūdra* he refrained from exhorting it to Dhṛtarāṣṭra himself and in this way he maintained the eternal tradition of *Dharma* and by his own precedent he set before the world an example that however learned a person may be, he must uphold the great traditions of the scriptures.

Vidurajī was not only a scholar and seer of truth but he was also an exclusive devotee of God. He had unswerving love for the revered feet of the Lord Śrī

* The exhortation made by Sanatsujāta have been compiled under the title *Sunatsujatīya* covering six chapters from 41 to 46 of the *Udyogaparva*. Its translation has been published by us without any abridgement on pages 509 to 520 in the first book of the Concise *Mahābhārata* published by us. Readers are advised to consult the same for details.

Kṛṣṇa. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa also had a great regard for him. When he went to Hastināpura as the messenger of the *Pāṇḍavas*, after meeting with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and visiting the courtiers he directly went to Vidurajī's house to be his guest. Then he met with His aunt (father's sister) Kuntī, besides this when he paid a visit to Duryodhana, being his relative he was invited by him (Duryodhana) to take food but he denied it outright and again came to the house of Vidura. Many respectable persons such as Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa, Bāhlīka and others turned up there to call on Him and all of them requested him to take food at their houses but Śrī Kṛṣṇa, showing due regards to them sent them off, and on that day, having fed the *Brāhmaṇas* before He dined at Vidurajī's house. By this incident one can easily guess that Vidurajī had a great love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The following declaration of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is popular with the people:

पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।

तदहं भक्त्युपहतमश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥

(*Gītā* IX. 26)

“Whoever offers to Me with love a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even water, I appear in person before that disinterested devotee of purified intellect and delightfully partake of that article offered by him with love.”

Great preparations for welcome not inspired with love and the royal pomp and show cannot attract Lord Kṛṣṇa but even the coarse and dry food if offered with

love is enough to appease Him.

After taking food Śrī Kṛṣṇa even stayed for the night at Vidura's house. The whole night passed in conversation. In the morning when the daily rituals were gone through Śrī Kṛṣṇa went to the assembly of the *Kauravas*. When Duryodhana audaciously intended to make Kṛṣṇa captive there and put him in prison, Vidurajī unfolded to him the power and greatness of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and told him that He is the manifestation of supremely absolute Lord and warned that if he dared humiliate him, he would cause his own ruin like moths that burn themselves into fire. After that when Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa revealed his Form universal, being stricken with fear everyone shut his eyes, only Droṇācārya, Bhīṣma, Vidura, Sañjaya and the *Rṣis* who were present there could have that vision for the Lord had bestowed upon them the Divine eye. Soon after withdrawing this marvellous divine play Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa made his way to Upaplavya whence he had come. Vidurajī along with other people went upto some distance to see Him off and after taking leave of him returned home.

When Śrī Kṛṣṇa came back without success in his mission, preparations for war began on both sides. With large armies comprising eighteen *Akṣauhini*, both sides gathered in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, but even that large army was slain like grass cut to pieces in eighteen days. King Dhṛtarāṣṭra was stricken with grief as all his hundred sons and his grand sons were slain in the

battlefield. At that time expounding the inevitability of death Vidurajī told Dhṛtarāṣṭra that those who die fighting in the battlefield attain a very blessed state in the other world and as such their death should not be mourned. He further said—“everytime a creature takes birth he establishes contact with different men and after death those relationships vanish away like dreams. In consideration of this fact also it is not wise to mourn for the dead relatives. Moreover all the events of union and bereavement which are the cause of one’s joys and sorrows are the outcome of one’s own good or evil doings and all the creatures must reap the consequences of their good or evil deed.” Then Vidurajī threw light on the ephemeral, unsubstantial and changeable nature of the world, the pain one has to undergo at the time of births and deaths, the imprudence of human beings, equality of all in the eyes of death, the importance of *Dharma* and explained at length how man can get rid of the worldly sorrows.

After the coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira, when Dhṛtarāṣṭra stayed with the *Pāṇḍavas*, Vidurajī also stayed with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and discoursed matters pertaining to *Dharma*. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī decided to leave that place and go to the forest, he too accompanied them. Going there he took vow of practising a severe penance. Denying food to himself he began to live in the solitary forest all by himself. Seldom were people visible in that uninhabited forest. After sometime when Yudhiṣṭhira along with all the members of his family and the army

as well, paid a visit to their uncle and aunt and mother Kuntī, not finding Vidurajī there enquired of Dhṛtarāṣṭra about him. Meanwhile Vidurajī was sighted at a short distance. He was wearing long matted hair on his head, was holding a piece of stone in his mouth and was all naked. All over his body stained with dust as it was, veins were visible. Layer of dirt had settled all over his body. Having cast a look at the hermitage he began to return. Yudhiṣṭhira rushed after him in order to meet him, and loudly introducing himself to him by name called him out again and again. On reaching the dense part of the forest, Vidurajī stood steadily reclining himself against a tree. Yudhiṣṭhira found Vidurajī reduced to a mere skeleton. He could be recognised only with great difficulty. Yudhiṣṭhira went up to him and offered him worship. Having attained the state of trance he looked at Yudhiṣṭhira with unwinking eyes. With the power of *Yoga* he entered into the body of Yudhiṣṭhira merging his limbs, senses and the vital airs with those of Yudhiṣṭhira. Vidurajī's body kept standing lifeless against that tree. Having led a virtuous life Vidurajī the embodiment of *Dharma* in the end entered into the body of Yudhiṣṭhirajī, *Dharma* in person. Glory to the *Dharma*.



Sañjaya—The Honourable Minister

Sañjaya was the minister of king Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He was a *Sūta* by caste. He was very loyal, intelligent and had a profound knowledge of *Dharma* and ethics. He was truthful as well as intrepid. He offered sound advice to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and sometimes he uttered words which sounded bitter but were conducive to his well-being. He did not abandon his companionship with Dhṛtarāṣṭra till the end. He was the favourite of the great sage Vedavyāsa and a lover of Arjuna and Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He strongly protested against the atrocities of Duryodhana and did not fail to rebuke even Dhṛtarāṣṭra in case he consented to his actions. When the *Pāṇḍavas* lost the stake in gambling for the second time and started living in the forest, bitterly criticizing the ill-treatment of Duryodhana to the *Pāṇḍavas* he said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra—“O king, the utter destruction of your entire family is but inevitable, nay even the innocent subject of yours won’t survive. Grandfather Bhīṣma, Droṇācārya and Vidurajī repeatedly forbade your sons, still that shameless Duryodhana, having called righteous Draupadī, the dear wife of the *Pāṇḍavas* into the assembly hall, insulted her. As the evil times

approach nearer man's wits become polluted. Even injustice seems to be just. Your sons have given open invitation to a fierce war by insulting in the crowded assembly hall beautiful Draupadī who is not born of a womb, is devoted to her husbands and had emerged from sacrificial altar. None but Duryodhana could do such a despicable act. Can even the most fearless minister make such disparaging but veracious remarks on a prince in the very presence of a monarch? Even the scriptures have observed—“अप्रियस्य च पथ्यस्य श्रोता वक्ता च दुर्लभः”. The hearer and the speaker of even beneficial word if they are unpleasant are found rare. Admitting that Sañjaya was right, Dhṛtarāṣṭra admitted his own weakness on account of which he could not prevent Duryodhana from perpetrating that atrocious action.

Sañjaya was a votary of peace and believed in persuasion. He tried his best to prevent the war and admonished both the sides by drawing their attention to the evil consequences of the war and the rift between them. *Pāṇḍavas* agreed but Duryodhana spurned the proposal of peace insultingly. Thus war became inevitable. It was predestined. Amongst *Kauravas* generally Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Vidura and Sañjaya had a common opinion because all were votaries of righteousness and had in their hearts sympathy for the *Pāṇḍavas*. All the four never hesitated to say the truth not caring for the

displeasure of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons. Moreover truth is generally bitter.

On being sent to Upaplavya by Dhṛtarāṣṭra for holding peace talks with the *Pāṇḍavas* on his behalf, Sañjaya approached them and sincerely praising them advised them to abstain from fighting. He said that neither *Dharma* nor material prosperity could be achieved through war. Settling the dispute through negotiation is the best means for establishing peace and king Dhṛtarāṣṭra too aspires for peace alone and not war. Being the favourite of both Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, he profoundly believed that the matter pressed upon by him will not be avoided. As for Arjuna he went on to declare that Arjuna could offer even his life for him if he were asked to do so. This goes to prove that Sañjaya had undivided love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Yudhiṣṭhira very lovingly expressed his agreement with what Sañjaya said but as far as the settlement of the dispute was concerned he put the condition that the kingdom of Indraprastha be restored to him. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa also supported the proposal of the *Dharmarāja* and Sañjaya returned to Hastināpura with the message from Yudhiṣṭhira. Approaching Dhṛtarāṣṭra he at first scolded him severely in a lonely place and subsequently in the presence of all conveyed to him the message of Yudhiṣṭhira and described to him the sort of preparations they were making for war and elaborately

described the power of the warriors on the side of the Pāṇḍavas. Simultaneously establishing the identification of one with the other told them how inseparably united Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were with each other. He said that when he called on Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna both of them were present in the inner apartment. Entrance into the room they were in at the moment, was forbidden even to Abhimanyu, Nakula and Sahadeva. On reaching there he found that Śrī Kṛṣṇa had placed His both legs on the lap of Arjuna and Arjuna's legs were extended to the lap of Draupadī and Satyabhāmā. This description given by Sañjaya not only proves the identification of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna but also goes to prove that Sañjaya had undivided love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. The place which was forbidden even for Abhimanyu, Nakula and Sahadeva and where Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were sitting in privacy in informal way with their chief queens, was acceded to without any hindrance by Sañjaya who uninterruptedly took part in their private consultations also. These things show that in his dealings with Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna he was quite frank and informal.

Besides being the lover of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Sañjaya possessed true knowledge of His divine aspect. Later on while describing to Dhṛtarāṣṭra the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the presence of the great Ṛṣi Vedavyāsa, revered Gāndhārī and the high souled Vidurajī, he

referred to Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Lord of all the realms. At this Dhṛtarāṣṭra asked him how he could know that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the very embodiment of God whereas he failed to recognize him as such. While replying to this question Sañjaya admitted in the presence of Vedavyāsa that he could recognize Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the true sense only through the eye of knowledge and but for such knowledge none could know Him in this way. He added that "I never resort to hypocrisy nor practise any pretentious *Dharma*; moreover, my inner senses stand purified through the practice of the *Yoga* of meditation." Then Vedavyāsa himself praising Sañjaya said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra—He possesses sound knowledge of the aspect of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the eternal Being, so if you listen to him he will rid you of the great fear of death." There can be no better proof of the fact that Sañjaya was endowed with learning. At this Dhṛtarāṣṭra lovingly asked Sañjaya to let him know the path which might lead even him to the true knowledge of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and which may enable him to attain Supreme State. Sañjaya explained to him thus—"Nobody can attain Śrī Kṛṣṇa without subduing the senses and senses can be overpowered only through renunciation. Knowledge can be acquired only through avoiding three things—negligence of duty, violence and worldly enjoyments. The supreme state can be attained only through abstaining from all the three. In the end Sañjaya made

a fine exposition to Dhṛtarāṣṭra of some of the divine names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This shows that Sañjaya was well-versed in the scriptures as well.

When preparations for war had already been made on both sides and the two armies were pitched on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, Vedavyāsa while bestowing upon Sañjaya the divine eye said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra—“O King, this Sañjaya will relate to you the happenings on the battlefield. Nothing on the entire battlefield shall lie hidden from his view. He will be invested with the divine eye and will become omniscient. He shall be able to visualize things seen and unseen, the occurrences during the day or night nay, even the inner thoughts shall stand revealed to him. Further more the weapons will not slay him, he won't feel tiresomeness in spite of strenuous work and will be able to come out of the battlefield unharmed.”

Well, since then Sañjaya came to be invested with the divine eye by the grace of Lord Vedavyāsa. Sitting at one place he could view all the occurrences on the battlefield as if he were perceiving them with his own eyes and accurately described them to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Sitting at one place he could know that on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra extending for miles where eighteen Akṣauhiṇī army (one *Akṣauhiṇī* consisting of infantry numbering 109350, cavalry numbering 65610, elephantry numbering 21870 and chariots numbering 21870) was engaged in

fighting among themselves he could know that at a particular time which warrior was fighting and with whom, which weapons and how many times are being used by him and on whom they are being used, how often does he change his different feats and how many times, with what adroitness he saves himself from enemies' attacks and what the particulars of his features are and what steed he is riding. He heard with his own ears the exhortations as contained in the *Bhagavadgītā* given to Arjuna by Śrī Kṛṣṇa (*Gītā* 18. 74-75). Not only did he listen to it, he observed as if he were seeing with his own eyes the facial expressions, the feelings that found expression on His face as well as His aspect as it was while exhorting Arjuna. Far less to speak of it when Śrī Kṛṣṇa revealed to Arjuna His cosmic aspect Sañjaya too witnessed it in the same way as Arjuna did see it though this aspect was not seen by anyone before and about which the Lord himself declares thus in chapter XI verse 48—I cannot be seen in this form by anyone else than you either through the study of the *Vedas* or of rituals or again through gifts, actions or austere penances." Later on withdrawing His universal form the Lord showed Arjuna His four-armed form as Lord himself tells is exceedingly difficult to be perceived even by gods about which He has stated in verse 53 of chapter XI of the *Gītā* that neither through penance, gift or even rituals can this form be seen; still that rare form was beheld by the most

blessed Sañjaya although he was sitting in Hastināpura. In the same context the Lord further explained to Arjuna that this form could be seen only through single-minded devotion (*Gītā* 11.54). From this one can easily infer that Sañjaya had an innate single-minded devotion to the Lord so that he could see that divine form. Even after hearing the recitation of the *Gītā* the memory of that form became a source of supreme delight to Sañjaya. He himself describes that blissful state thus—

राजन्संस्मृत्य संस्मृत्य संवादमिममद्भुतम् ।
 केशवार्जुनयोः पुण्यं हृष्यामि च मुहुर्मुहुः ॥
 तच्च संस्मृत्य संस्मृत्य रूपमत्यद्भुतं हरेः ।
 विस्मयो मे महान्राजहृष्यामि च पुनः पुनः ॥

(*Gītā* 18. 76-77)

“Hearing over and over that sacred and mystic conversation between Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, O king! I rejoice again and yet again.”

“Remembering also again and again that most wonderful form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, great is my wonder and I rejoice over and over again.”

This shows that the love and reverence he had for Śrī Kṛṣṇa was rational for he knew His true glory. Declaring their victory prior to the beginning of the actual fighting he predicted that—

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।
 तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिर्धुवानीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥

(*Gītā* 18 .78)

“Wherever there is Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of Yoga and wherever there is Arjuna, the wielder of the Gāṇḍīva bow, goodness, victory, glory and unfailing righteousness are there, such is my conviction.”

After the end of the war having stayed with Yudhiṣṭhira for sometime, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī proceeded towards the forest. Sañjaya too followed them. There too he served his master in the best way and when he as well as Gāndhārī and Kuntī were surrounded on all sides by forest fire as directed by them he left their company and arrived at the hermitage to inform the sages that they had given up their mortal frame and thence proceeded toward the Himālayas. Thus the life of Sañjaya was not an ordinary one. The lesson that we can draw from his life is that of whatever carte a man may be he can elevate himself to a high degree in his life through divine grace.



Vedavyāsa—The Divine Being

Vedavyāsa, esteemed as *Bhagavān* to indicate his divinity, was the son of a great *Ṛṣi* called Parāśara. He was born of the womb of Satyavatī, the foster daughter of the king of *Kaivartas*. Vyāsajī was an exalted person endowed with supernatural powers. He was a great messenger of God born with a mission. Finding people losing their power of retention he compiled the *Vedas* into four major heads—the *Ṛgveda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Sāmaveda* and the *Atharvaveda* and taught these compilations to his disciples—one each. Each compilation was further divided into a number of heads and subheads. In this way through his efforts the Vedic literature received exhaustive treatment. The term Vyāsa means expansion and since the *Vedas* were expanded through his efforts, he was verily called Vedavyāsa. He was born in an island and was dark complexioned so people called him Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana also. On account of living in Badarīvana he was given the name Bādarāyaṇa as well. All the eighteen *Purāṇas* (myths) including *Mahābhārata* were composed by him. In order to bring home to the people the essence of all knowledge contained in the *Upaniṣads*, He

devised *Brahmasūtras* on which different *Acāryas* have attempted different expositions and propounded varied opinions of their own. A treatise entitled *Vyāsa Smṛti*, whose authorship is attributed to him is also available. Thus the Hindu culture and the Indian literature is highly indebted to him. Vyāsajī is called the chief exponent of the *Sanātana Dharma* (duties) laid down in the *Vedas*, the scriptures and the *Purāṇas*. The Hindu race will ever remain highly indebted to him. So long as the Hindu race and Indian culture are not extinct the name of Vyāsajī will remain immortal in the history. He can safely be called the beacon light and teacher to the world. That is why he enjoys the honour of being called *Jagadguru* (which literally means the teacher born to teach the world). On every *Guru Pūrṇimā*, a date which falls in second half of the month of *Āṣāḍha* in the Hindu calendar (and which is auspicious to the worship of ones preceptor) every Hindu householder, who has faith in God, worships him. On account of him, the world is privileged to possess an unparalleled gem, the *Bhagavadgītā*, containing the immortal teachings of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and by inlaying the *Mahābhārata* with this superb gem he placed them within the easy reach of the world.

Vedavyāsa, the great *Rṣi*, can see through all the times—the present, the past and the future. He can explore the heart of each and every man and can

instantly reach any place at his will. Soon after his birth, having obtained the permission of his mother, he made his way to forest to perform austerities there. While departing he said to his mother that whenever she felt his absence, she should recall him to her mind and in no time she would find him by her side.

Having escaped from the house built of lac through the device suggested by Vidurajī, when the *Pāṇḍavas* began to live in the city called Ekacakrā during that period Vyāsajī visited them and in the context of his conversation told them the story of Draupadī's previous birth and assured them that the girl was pre-destined to be their wife. Hearing this the *Pāṇḍavas* were much pleased to go to Pāñcāla to take part in the *Swayamvara* of Draupadī. On reaching there Arjuna won Draupadī by fulfilling the conditions of the *Swayamvara* and as desired by Kuntī the five brothers wanted to woo her. But king Drupada raised an objection to it. Meanwhile, Vyāsajī arrived there and narrated to Drupada the story of Draupadī's previous birth and thus made him agree to marry his daughter to all the five brothers.

When emperor Yudhiṣṭhira was performing the *Rājasūya Yajña* at Indraprastha, Vedavyāsa arrived there with the host of his discipies to take part in the *Yajña*. When the *Yajña* came to an end Vedavyāsajī went to Yudhiṣṭhira to take leave of him. During the course of his conversation with him he said that after

thirteen years since then the *Kṣatriyas* would be completely annihilated and you would be instrumental in it due to the fault of Duryodhana.

Duryodhana was not satisfied even after usurping their all and sending the *Pāṇḍavas* in exile for a period as long as twelve years. He began to devise plans for killing the *Pāṇḍavas* while they were staying in the forest. In collusion with his maternal uncle Śakuni, Karna and Duḥśāsana he made plans for attacking the *Pāṇḍavas* in a hidden manner and all of them having equipped themselves with arms and divine weapons and riding on their chariots started towards the forest. Vyāsajī came to know about this plot through his divine eye and without any loss of time approached them and diverted them from the evil deed. In order to bring round Dhṛtarāṣṭra he went to him and said—"It is not a good thing that having defeated the *Pāṇḍavas* in gambling you have sent them to the forest. It will not yield good result. Remain careful if you cherish your own welfare and that of your sons. What a pity that evil-minded Duryodhana wants to kill the *Pāṇḍavas* in order to usurp the throne. I warn you to check your overfondled son from doing such misdeed. He would better peacefully stay at home. If he tries to attempt at the lives of the *Pāṇḍavas*, he himself shall be deprived of his own life. If you do not eschew the

hostile thoughts of your son, things may take a serious turn. In my opinion Duryodhana should go to the forest all by himself and stay with the *Pāṇḍavas*. Through the association with the *Pāṇḍavas* evil thoughts may be replaced by loving ones. But it is not so easy an affair, to transform one's innate tendencies. If you want to protect the *Kauravas* and safeguard their lives, ask your sons to reconcile themselves with the *Pāṇḍavas*." Vyāsajī added—"The great Ṛṣi Maitreya is due to arrive here very soon. He will exhort your sons to seek reconciliation with the *Pāṇḍavas*. You should act upon his advice without applying your mind to it. If you do not act upon his advice he will be angry and curse you." But wicked Duryodhana did not act upon Maitreya's advice and as such he had to become the target of his rage.

Not only Vyāsajī could see through all the three times but also was endowed with unimaginable capabilities. When the *Pāṇḍavas* were living in the forest, one day he approached them and imparted to Arjuna through Yudhiṣṭhira *Smṛtividya* (the knowledge of remembrance) which made him capable of having the vision of God. Moreover, he bestowed Sañjaya the Divine eye through which he could not only know the happenings of the battlefield but enabled him to see the cosmic form and the Divine four-armed form of the Lord as well. Besides he got the opportunity to

hear the meritorious teachings of the *Bhagavadgītā* which none but Arjuna had heard. When the Divine eye which endowed Sañjaya with so many capabilities, it is difficult to imagine what would be the capabilities of Vyāsajī himself who bestowed him the Divine eye. He was after all the partial manifestation of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

One day when Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī were living in the forest Yudhiṣṭhira with his family went to pay a visit to them. Vyāsajī arrived there and finding that they were not till then rid of the sorrow caused by the bereavement of their sons and also finding Gāndhārī grieving over the separation of her sons, he told Dhṛtarāṣṭra to ask for a boon. Emperor Dhṛtarāṣṭra expressed the desire to know as to what could be the ultimate fate of their friends and kinsmen who had laid down their lives in the battle of *Mahābhārata* and at the same time he requested Vedavyāsa to enable him to have a look at them. Vyāsajī acceded to his request and said to Gāndhārī—“Tonight all of you shall see your departed relations in such an aspect as though they had awakened from sleep. Having performed their daily rituals in the evening, as desired by Vyāsajī, everyone gathered on the bank of the Gaṅgā, entering into the sacred water of the Gaṅgā, Vyāsajī made a call for the warriors on the side of the *Kauravas* and the *Pāṇḍavas*, who had died in the war. Just then emerging from the water was

heard such a tumultuous noise as was heard in the battle of Kurukṣetra when the armies of the *Kauravas* and the *Pāṇḍavas* had gathered there. Then keeping Bhīṣma and Droṇa in the forefront, all the kings and princes who had died like warriors fighting, soon emerged from the waters. The warriors were wearing the same dress as they wore in the battlefield and their banners and vehicles were also the same in their minutest details. They were clothed in glorious garments and were wearing superb garlands. All of them were wearing brilliant ear-rings and their bodies were ashine with a celestial glow. Everyone looked as if he were rid of hostility, pride, anger and envy. Then *Gandharvas* (the demigods) were singing their praises and the bards were offering them prayers. At that time Vyāsajī bestowed Dhṛtarāṣṭra the divine eye so that he could behold them well. That sight was strange, unimaginable and exhilarating. Everyone looked at the sight with unwinking eyes. Then all the warriors who had gathered there renouncing all their anger and hostilities, met with their relatives respectively. In this way the cordial meeting of the loving souls continued through the whole night. Then all of them entered into the water of the Bhāgīrathī in the same manner as they had come out and departed to their respective celestial abodes. On that occasion addressing the ladies, whose husbands had laid down their lives fighting in the battlefield, he said—“Those of

you who want to attain the realms where your husbands are, should take a dip in the water of the Gaṅgā.” Hearing him many a woman entered the water and casting aside their mortal frame reached the abode of their husbands. Just as putting on glorious garments and ornaments their husbands had appeared there so also putting on glorious garments and ornaments and seated in chariots, they reached at their destination.

Hither, when king Janamejaya heard about the marvellous incident his heart was filled with great curiosity and he himself desired to have a look at his dead father king Parīkṣit. Vyāsajī was already present there with a view to fulfil the desire of the king. He at once invoked king Parīkṣit to appear in person. Janamejaya gave a bath to his father at the time when he himself took bath at the end of the *Yajña* and thereafter Parīkṣit departed from there. Thus we see that the great Ṛṣi Vedavyāsa was a super human and a powerful personality. I conclude this chapter by bowing low at revered feet of the great Ṛṣi, the author of the *Mahābhārata*.

